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ESSAY ON BURN

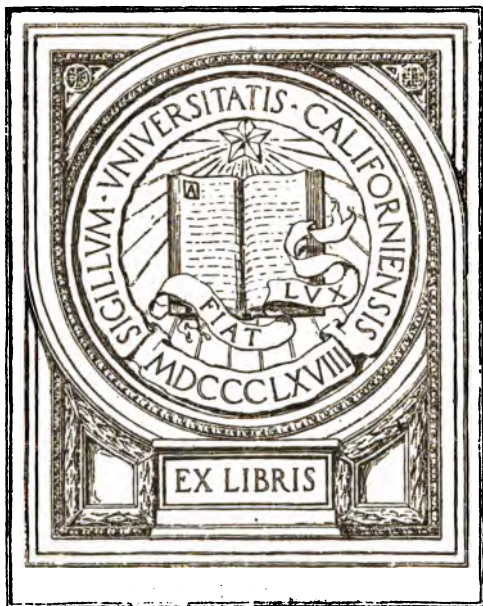
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CARLYLE'S
"
ESSAY ON BURNS

EDITED
WITH INTRODUCTION, NOTES, AND
A SELECTION OF BURNS'S POEMS

BY
CARRIE E. TUCKER DRACASS

ENGLEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL, CHICAGO



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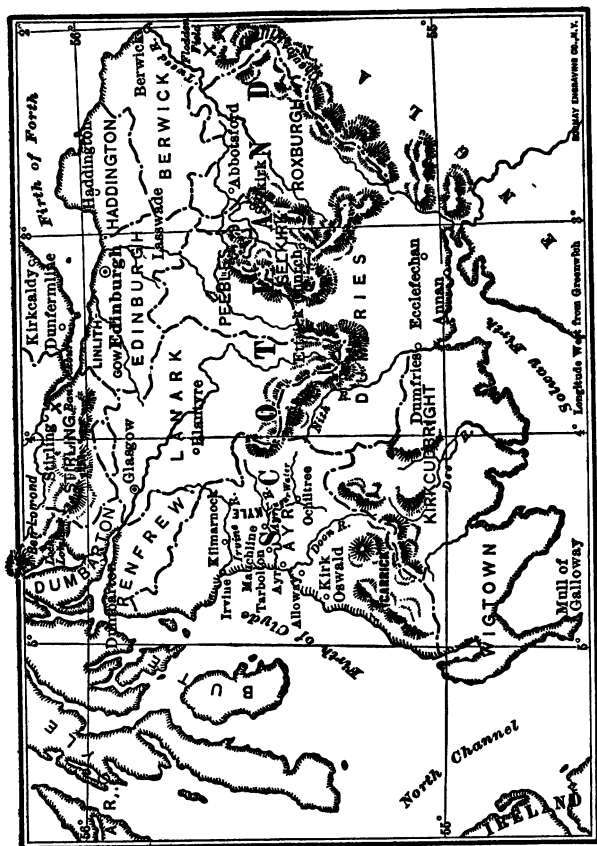
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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
THOMAS CARLYLE.	
His Life	1
His Theories	6
His Literary Influence	8
ROBERT BURNS.	
His Life	10
His Dependence on the Tradition of Patronage	16
The Age in Which He Lived	17
SELECTED POEMS OF BURNS	21
SUPPLEMENTARY READING LIST	51
BOOKS OF REFERENCE	54
THE ESSAY	55
CARLYLE'S SUMMARY	126
"THE HERO AS MAN OF LETTERS—ROBERT BURNS"	129
NOTES	137
EXERCISES AND SUGGESTIONS	155
QUESTIONS TO SHOW THE COURSE OF THE ESSAY	155
FOR THE FURTHER STUDY OF THE ESSAY	160



THE LAND OF CARLYLE AND BURNS.

INTRODUCTION.

THOMAS CARLYLE.

HIS LIFE.

His Youth and Training.—Thomas Carlyle was born at Ecclefechan, Annandale, in the shire of Dumfries, Scotland, December 4, 1795. His father was a stone mason—his house, built with his own hands, was considered the best in Ecclefechan. Carlyle's mother was, like most women of her class, without "schooling"; but she was an intelligent woman of great force of character. After her son left home she learned to write that she might keep in correspondence with him. The family life of the Carlyles was the simple, sturdy, God-fearing life of the better class of Scotch peasantry; and they had the Scotch ambition to see their boy in the ministry.

The education of Thomas Carlyle began at home: his father taught him arithmetic, and his mother reading (for she had read the printed Bible daily). He continued his studies at the village school, and later at the "doleful and hateful Academy" at Annandale; and at fourteen he entered the University of Edinburgh. Here he spent as much time as possible in reading, declaring that the library was the best part of the University. When he had finished the course, he did what his parents wished him to do, without other pleasure in the choice: he registered as a non-resident divinity student.

Then for several years he taught, first at Annandale and later at Kirkcaldy, to get money to pay for his course in theology. To Carlyle everything in life—every belief and every act—was of tremendous significance; and he himself did nothing lightly. Now, as he said, a “voice came to me saying, ‘Arise and settle the problem of thy life!’ And so I entered into my chamber and closed the door. . . . Doubt, Fear, Unbelief, Mockery, and Scorn were there; and I arose and wrestled with them.” It seems that Carlyle had lost his hold on the old unquestioned religious beliefs and had not yet found anything to take their place. At least he knew that he was not in accord with the doctrine of the Scottish Church, and turned from theology to law.

He went to Edinburgh. He had hoped to get some literary work; but, so far as known, the only writing that he did during these years was on articles for the *Edinburgh Encyclopedia*. However, he read widely in the University library—Spanish, French, and German, romance and history. Also, he tutored Charles Buller, the son of a prominent London family. It was through this friendship and that with his old comrade Edward Irving, now a rising London clergyman, that opportunity came for him to visit both London and Paris.

His German Translations.—In London, in 1824, Carlyle met the editor of the *London Magazine*, who made him an offer for some translations from the German. Thus began his connection with the literary life of London, and his special work in German literature.

At the time that Carlyle made these translations the greatest era of German literature was passing almost unnoticed by English men of letters. Few of them even could have read easily a page of Goethe or Schiller or Wieland. Carlyle not only had mastered the German language, but

had comprehended the German mind. He had himself the German's insight—the tendency and the ability to look deeper than the surface, to discern an underlying principle where others see none, and to interpret events by their moral significance. Writing of his German studies he says, "I could tell you of the new heaven and the new earth the study of German literature has opened up to me." Probably he was the only English writer of his day ready to open it up to his countrymen.

Some of his papers for the *London Magazine* he afterwards developed into a *Life of Schiller*, which brought him warm praise from Goethe, then an old man, the last of the great group of German writers. Before 1825 he had translated also Goethe's *Apprenticeship of Wilhelm Meister* and a series of shorter tales from Goethe, Richter (who died in 1825), Tieck, Musäus, and others. He had written besides a number of criticisms, including one on the first part of Goethe's *Faust*, and had translated Legendre's *Geometry and Trigonometry*, to which he had added notes and a new chapter.

At Craigenputtock.—It was in 1826 that he married Jane Welsh and went to Edinburgh to live. But Carlyle cared little for the social life of the city and needed quiet for his studies; so two years later they moved to Craigenputtock, a small property belonging to Mrs. Carlyle, fifteen miles from Dumfries.

Up to this time, despite the amount he had written, Carlyle had not become popular. Like all leaders of thought, he had to create his own public. Englishmen were not yet in sympathy with his subjects; his point of view towards everything in the universe seemed to differ from theirs; and his manner of expression was not at all what had been accepted as polished literary style. But when he had placed some of his articles with Francis

Jeffrey, then editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, the foremost literary periodical in Great Britain, he seemed a step nearer to recognition. Most of the articles now printed in the three volumes of his *Miscellanies* were written at Craigenputtock and published first either in the *Review* or in *Frazer's Journal*. In this latter magazine appeared the series of papers called *Sartor Resartus*, which by its originality and force drew to Carlyle the attention of the world and marked the beginning of his literary fame.

It was while Carlyle was at Craigenputtock that John Lockhart's *Life of Robert Burns* was published. In a letter of June 10, 1828, Carlyle wrote, referring to a visit he had recently made to Jeffrey, "I am to write him an article on Burns. . . . Lockhart had written a kind of 'Life of Burns,' and men in general were making another uproar about Burns. It is this book, a trivial one enough, which I am to pretend reviewing." In Carlyle's diary stands this note: "Finished a paper on Burns, September 16, 1828, at this Devil's Den, Craigenputtock."

It was this "review," which, by Carlyle's inevitable treatment had developed into an essay, that prompted Jeffrey to read his friend an editorial lecture. He had found Carlyle "verbose and prone to exaggeration"; and he rated him roundly on "your extravagance . . . that makes your writings intolerable to many and ridiculous to not a few; . . . an unlucky ambition to appear more original than you are," and "the delusive hope of converting our English intellects" to German thought and style. Furthermore, Jeffrey urged that what he called Carlyle's "idolatries," his belief in the necessity and power of the individual leadership of men of genius, would be—in fact, had been—offensive to the dominant Liberal party, which was agitating democratic reforms. But so sure was Carlyle's belief in the worth of what he had written, and so unalterably

was his style the outward and visible sign of the depth and sincerity and vehemence of his feeling, that the essay was finally printed with but very slight changes, appearing in No. XCVI of the *Edinburgh Review*, December, 1828.

In London.—At Craigenputtock both Carlyle and his wife had suffered much from ill-health and straitened circumstances, and Carlyle had felt the lack of reference books that he needed in his writing; so they decided to move to London (1834). The new home was in Cheyne Row in the Chelsea district, and as the “Seer of Chelsea” Carlyle is known in literary history.

He won his first personal popularity through a series of lectures on German literature. Other courses followed: *On the History of Literature*, *The Revolutions of Modern Europe*, *Heroes and Hero Worship*. Of these Leigh Hunt says, “It was as if some Puritan had come to life again, liberalized by German Philosophy and his own intense reflections and experiences.”

Meanwhile Carlyle was bringing out his masterpieces and collecting and revising for publication some of his earlier writings: *The French Revolution*, *Chartism* (a discussion of the condition of the working classes), *Past and Present* (a review of motives—a comparison of ancient and modern ideals), *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, *The Life of John Sterling*, and *Latter-Day Pamphlets*; and *Sartor Resartus* now complete, and the first edition of his *Miscellanies*. In 1865 he finished the sixth volume of his *History of Frederick, Commonly Called The Great*—“the last of Carlyle's great works, the last and grandest of them.” This history Carlyle had been writing for twelve years and meditating longer. In collecting material for it, he had visited Berlin and the German battle-fields.

In 1865 Carlyle was elected Lord Rector of Edinburgh University, and in April of the following year he delivered

his Installation Address. The hour of his greatest honor was the hour of his greatest affliction. Before he could reach London on his return trip, his wife died—as he wrote on her gravestone, “suddenly snatched away from him and the light of his life as if gone out.” For fifteen years he mourned her loss. During this time he wrote but little: some articles for *Macmillan's Magazine*, a series of criticisms on the *Portraits of John Knox*, and some papers on the *Early Kings of Norway*, which appeared in a small volume in 1875. He died at his home in Chelsea, December 4, 1881. At his own request he was buried in the churchyard at Ecclefechan, and not in Westminster Abbey.

HIS THEORIES.

Of Realities and Shows.—To understand at the outset Carlyle's interpretation of life and the universe as a whole, one should read *Sartor Resartus* (“The Tailor Patched”), a “Philosophy of Clothes.” By “clothes” Carlyle means the outward evidence, show, or “vesture” of whatever exists.

“Thus in this one pregnant subject of Clothes, rightly understood, is included all that men have thought, dreamed, done, and been: the whole External Universe and what it holds is but Clothing; and the essence of all Science lies in The Philosophy of Clothes.”

This is the lesson that Carlyle emphasizes, not only here but in every one of his writings: Judge nothing by its clothes or its semblance, but find out the thing itself—its reality.

Of Heroes and Hero Worship.—“The history of what man has accomplished in this world is at bottom the history of the great men who have worked here,” said Carlyle,

in beginning his London lectures on *Heroes*. The sentence suggests not only Carlyle's interest in biography, but his view of history as a succession of epochs, each epoch standing for the ideals of its greatest man. "All Society is based on hero-worship," he declared; . . . "the modelers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men [have] contrived to do or to attain"—these have been their leaders and "real kings." In his several lectures on the Hero as Prophet, as Poet, as Priest, as Man of Letters, and as King, he showed how men like Mohammed, Shakespeare, Luther, Rousseau, and Napoleon had pointed the way each for a vast following, ruled the hearts of men and changed the course of thought. "Heroism" Carlyle defined as "the divine relation . . . which in all times unites a great man to other men." He rejoices that "all of us reverence and must ever reverence great men"; for it proves that mankind still through shams and cant is seeking Truth, though not always do men recognize this great man when he appears among them, even do not discover him at all. The Hero "stands upon things and not shows of things"; it is by virtue of his insight that he leads. Such a hero he found in Robert Burns.¹

Of Industry.—So out of sympathy was Carlyle with the tendencies of his time that he has been called the "Censor of the age." It was a period of great industrial activity; but to Carlyle the modern use of "industrialism" meant "selfishness." He watched with growing anxiety and sadness the division of the business world into the few wealthy capitalists and the thousands of struggling wage earners. It was in *Past and Present* that he used

¹ Note how (p. 129) Carlyle introduces Burns into *The Hero as Man of Letters*.

that phrase which has since become famous, "Captains of Industry," by which he meant the leaders of organized labor. He believed that with the increase of capitalists there would be a widening of class inequalities—the class distinctions against which Burns had protested in *A Man's a Man for a' That*; and as a remedy for this he advocated, with Ruskin, "getting back to the land," or coöperation. He called himself a Liberal of the quiet sort; but against the reforms of the Liberal party he held his general ground of complaint, that they did not sufficiently take into account the value of spiritual forces in controlling the lives of men. No abstract theories of economics could interest him; he saw in all alike only hardness of heart—one man pitted against another for material gain. Yet no man ever preached more vigorously by both precept and example, "Work!"

HIS LITERARY INFLUENCE.

More than is the case perhaps with any other writer, Carlyle's moral influence is his literary influence. His passion for truth—his detestation of a superficial judgment; his impatience with statements obtained second hand and passed on as if for very fact; his scorn of the cant of literary criticism, that is satisfied with an affected phrase of long respectability in place of an honest opinion; and, above all, his own fearlessness and his hatred of this very indifference to untruth—of all this his own writing is a great example. Add to this his clear, just view of what a biography should be, of what a criticism should be, and of the attitude of the critic, as given in this *Essay on Burns*, and we see that it is his moral influence in literary matters that is more impressive than any method of his style.

"Opinion has in the main followed Carlyle's luminous

finger," says Dr. Richard Garnett. We may cite in support of this his *Cromwell*, which entirely changed the world's judgment of the great Puritan, because it presented the whole man, not the one side of him that appealed to a favorable or an unfavorable prejudice.

We insert the following quotation about his *Frederick II*—a criticism worth the student's while to read carefully. Every sentence is a telling comment on some characteristic of Carlyle's mind or work and suggests his influence on after historians. In 1882, writing Carlyle's biography, the English historian James Anthony Froude set down this:

"'Frederick' was translated instantly into German. . . . The sharpest scrutiny only served to show how accurate was the workmanship. Few people anywhere in Europe dreamt twenty years ago of the position which Germany, and Prussia at the head of it, were so soon to occupy. Yet Carlyle's book seemed to have been composed in conscious anticipation of what was coming. He had given a voice to the national feeling. He had brought up as it were from the dead the creator of the Prussian monarchy, and had replaced him among his people as a living and breathing man. He had cleared the air for the impending revolution; and Europe, when it came, could see how the seed had grown which had expanded into the German Empire. . . . The book contained . . . a gallery of historical figures executed with a skill which placed Carlyle at the head of literary portrait painters. . . . The tone of 'Frederick' nowhere harmonized with popular sentiment among us, and every page contained something to offend. Yet even in England" . . .

and the passage closes with further praise.

Carlyle recreated the past largely by the dramatic use of episodes. He did this most notably in his *French Revolution*, which is a succession of vivid scenes. Into each

scene he crowded the movements of high personages and squalid mobs, making the whole an epitome of the passion and terror that once moved its living men.

As to details of style, we will note but two by which Carlyle put new vigor into English prose. First, he did not try to follow some conventional practice of rhetoric in constructing his work, as if rhetorical form were a vessel ready-shaped into which he must pour his meaning, and not rather the outward shape his meaning must develop as it grew. Secondly, he chose words and phrases of literary and historical association to express even what might seem to be the simplest literal statement. Here is a Biblical phrase, here one from myth, here a word from Milton, here one from Shakespeare, and here an epithet from history. His language is rich in content, and the more forcible because of the abundance of this unobtrusive illustration.

ROBERT BURNS.

HIS LIFE.

Boyhood at Ayr.—Robert Burns was born January 25, 1759, at Ayr, parish of Alloway, Scotland. His father, William Burness, as the name was then written, was a man of "stubborn integrity," conspicuous even among the Scots for his deep-seated piety. His mother was "sincerely religious, of an equable temper, and with a memory stored with old ballads, songs, and traditions, with which she amused her children."

During Burns's childhood there resided in the family an old woman "remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition." Of her he says, "She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs

concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, cantraips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery"; and these fostered in him the latent seeds of poetry.

He received such education as was common at the time, and, in addition, read at home such works as the *Spectator*; the *Iliad*, translated by Pope; Locke *On the Human Understanding*; some of Shakespeare's plays, Allan Ramsay's *Works*; and a collection of songs. Of the latter Burns says, "This was my *vade mecum*. I pored over them driving my cart, or walking to labor, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true, the tender, or sublime, from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic-craft, such as it is."

During his fifteenth year, while engaged in the work of the harvest field, he composed his first song, *Handsome Nell*, to the tune of the "favorite reel" of the young woman, who, according to the custom of the time, was working with him. "Thus with me," he says, "began love and poetry"—and what is known as the first period of his literary work. From this time on he continued writing love-songs, epistles, satires, and poems both humorous and descriptive, full of the feelings and experiences of the simple rural folk among whom he lived.

Songs, Satires, and a Book (1779-1787).—When Burns was twenty years old, the family moved to Lochlea in the parish of Tarbolton, where they stayed for seven years. Burns took advantage of an opportunity that came to him of attending school one term at Kirkoswald. Later, he went to Irvine, learned the flax-dresser's art, and set up a shop. The venture was not successful, as his partner cheated him, and the shop burned down while he was indulging in a New Year's carousal. Here also he formed companionships which led him into habits of dissipation.

In 1784, shortly after Burns's return to Lochlea, his father died. The headstone by his grave, bearing the verses by his poet son, still stands in the kirkyard at Allo-way.

From Tarbolton the family moved to Mossgiel. In the four years here Burns did his best work—here wrote most of the poems of which Carlyle speaks in the Essay. His favorite time for composition was while following the plow; and when the day's labor was over, he would go up to his room in the attic to write down the verses he had made.

At this time there was in Scotland, especially in the western part, a division in matters of religion; one party held rigidly to the older and more exacting rules of the Church and were known as the adherents of the Old Light; the other, somewhat less strict in religious observance and broader in doctrinal views, were known as the adherents of the New Light. In the controversy waged in Ayrshire, Robert Burns allied himself with the New Lights.

He had been publicly rebuked for violating the rules of the Church; one of his close friends had suffered also. So Burns wrote a poem to satirize the narrow-minded zeal and strict discipline of the orthodox faction. This was *The Twa Herds, or The Holy Tulzie*; ¹ and he soon followed it by *Holy Willie's Prayer*, *The Ordination*, and *The Holy Fair*.

It was not likely that an unbending member of the Old Lights would care to see his daughter married to such an independent wit as the writer of these satires; and so it was that Robert Burns and Jean Armour took matters into their own hands, secretly vowed their faith to each other and set their names to a written bond between

¹ Brawl.

them. Though by no means to be commended, this was in Scotland accounted a legal marriage; but Mr. Armour, as soon as he knew of it, determined to annul the contract, and insisted that he had done so when he had forced them to destroy the bond. He could have done nothing worse for the poet, whom he thus turned loose to what consolation of work and company he might find. Without the ambition that a home of his own would have given him, Burns's worldly affairs went from bad to worse. Mr. Armour demanded that he give surety for the support of his children to a sum far beyond what he could meet. In utter despondency he decided to go out to seek a fortune from the plantations of Jamaica. To pay for the passage, he was advised to publish his poems by subscription; and the volume appeared in July, 1786, with the title, "*Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, by Robert Burns." It proved a successful venture. As he was about to embark, he received an earnest request that he publish a second edition. He determined to do so and to remain in Scotland.

Edinburgh and Fame (1787-1791).—To secure the publication of the second edition of the poems, Burns went to Edinburgh. The gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt each subscribed for a copy of the new book, which Burns dedicated to them. This club of nobles and landed gentry, originally formed to keep up field sports, was the most influential social factor in Scotland; so everywhere the "Ayrshire Ploughman" was received with the greatest enthusiasm. His conversation, even more than his poems, impressed people with his genius; and he was fêted and dined by this lord and that, and called upon to use his talents to entertain his lordship's guests. With part of the funds obtained from his book he made short trips through Scotland, visiting, among other places, the Border region so famous in song and story. The next winter

he was again in Edinburgh to attend to matters of business connected with the publication of the poems and to secure, if possible, some employment that would assure him a stated income.

His reception was not so enthusiastic as it had been the first winter, and for this his habits were in part responsible. However, his friends secured for him an appointment as "gauger" in the Excise Department. His income never amounted to more than seventy pounds a year, but together with the receipts from his poems it enabled him to do what he had long desired—lease a farm at Ellisland and there make a home. And now Mr. Armour, less displeased with his son-in-law grown famous, allowed him publicly to marry Jean.

As gauger one of Burns's duties was to collect the taxes on liquors and to enforce the laws relative to its sale. This required many trips through the country, which, though they were pleasant, proved unprofitable. His farming did not receive the attention it needed, his convivial habits were cultivated, and only fragments of time were left for writing. He has called these months at Ellisland the happiest of his life. He interested himself in the affairs of the neighborhood, and through his instrumentality a parish library was started. Remembering the scarcity of books in the home of his boyhood, he believed that much could be done for young people by placing within their reach a judiciously selected library. At Ellisland he wrote some of his most delightful songs: *To Mary in Heaven*, *Auld Lang Syne*, *John Anderson my Jo*, *John*, and his longer poem, *Tam o' Shanter*.

Dumfries and Patriotism (1791-1796).—In 1791 he gave up the farm at Ellisland and moved to Dumfries. He was now giving up his days to his duties as excise-man, and his evenings to gatherings at the Globe Tavern

and at other places where his social talents and his songs made him a great favorite. These were the days when the French Revolution was kindling a passion for freedom in all the peasants of Europe. Burns was too sympathetic to be discreet. On one occasion he purchased four small guns (taken from a smuggling ship) and directed them to the French Legislative Assembly with a letter. These were confiscated in the English custom house. Burns had done enough to bring himself into disfavor with the Government and destroy all hope of his promotion. He was remonstrated with by the Excise Board, but he still continued to express himself freely, especially at convivial parties. At one of these, when the health of William Pitt was drunk, he followed it by "craving a bumper to the health of a much better man—General Washington." Yet it was not long before Burns joined the Dumfries volunteers—as loyal a Scotsman as any.

About this time came an invitation from George Thomson, an Edinburgh gentleman of some means and leisure, asking him to assist in making a collection of Scottish melodies, airs, and words, which, as one of a small band of musical amateurs, Mr. Thomson was then projecting. Burns accepted the invitation, but stipulated that he should receive no remuneration whatever. He sent Mr. Thomson over a hundred songs. With these were many letters, in which his powers of criticism and judgment are as marked as is his genius in the songs.

A few original poems followed in the brief time that was left to the poet; but the deprivations of his early and the dissipations of his later years had already told severely on his naturally robust frame and bright mind. His melancholy and his nervous troubles increased, aggravated by his grief at the death of his only and much-loved daughter. His last sickness was the result of exposure

in a snowstorm. The end came July 21, 1796. At his funeral, words and honors were bestowed upon him, which, had they come during his lifetime, might have lessened the burden of his last years. In a corner of St. Michael's churchyard in Dumfries is his grave, marked by the "brave mausoleum" which his country has erected.

At the table of Lord Liverpool in London, shortly after the death of Burns, Mr. Pitt, it is said, remarked, "I can think of no verse since Shakespeare's that has so much the appearance of coming sweetly from nature."

HIS DEPENDENCE ON THE TRADITION OF PATRONAGE.

When the members of the Caledonian Hunt set their mark of approval on Burns's work, financially backed its publication, and allowed him to use their name above the dedicatory letter printed in the front of his volume of poems, they were binding him to them as their henchman by the old tradition of patronage.

Without the backing of this socially powerful body, Burns would have had no security on which a publisher would have been willing to print his book, for he was unable to pay for an edition himself; and further, when published, the copies would have been slow to circulate and sell. Education was by no means general in Britain at the close of the eighteenth century, and in Scotland especially the reading public was small. No publisher would buy outright the work of an unknown author, for he could not afford to bank on the doubtful sale of an unrecommended book.

In 1755, Dr. Samuel Johnson in his famous letter to Lord Chesterfield, refusing that nobleman's tardy aid and denying any obligation to him "for what Providence has

enabled me to do for myself," gave, as has been said, "the death-blow to patronage." But few authors had the courage, independence, and tenacity of Samuel Johnson; and for a while patronage lingered on.

It had taken more than seven centuries for education to make a reading public; and for fully as long as this patronage had been the support of English literature. In return English writers had catered to the vanity of their patrons by flattering verses, provided entertainment for their courts by masques and plays, and furthered their ambitions in politics by stinging satires on their rivals, producing side by side with such servile drudgery some of the grandest works of genius.

The poetry of Robert Burns could not have remained forever hidden. But to him personally the patronage of Edinburgh society came as a boon; and under the old tradition, he repaid the obligation—extravagantly, recklessly. Not that he did its members individually particular service with his pen; he made them the priceless return of the best years of his life spent at their beck and call. And yet we know that more than once—as gauger and farmer, and afterwards—he did make a short struggle to free himself from the need of patronage.

THE AGE IN WHICH HE LIVED.

"Happily for him, Burns's poetical life fell within a period in which it had come to be felt that the machinery of the classical school of poetry was worn out, and that resource must be had, for poetical power, to unexhausted and inexhaustible nature."—JOHN SERVICE.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, to which Carlyle refers as an "Age the most prosaic Britain had yet seen," such men as Defoe, Addison, Swift, and Steele

had shown of what English prose was capable; they had given it "vigor, point, and definiteness," and Pope had as nearly as possible applied these principles to verse. That is, the literature of the eighteenth century had been carefully descriptive and narrative and sometimes brilliantly epigrammatic and satirically humorous. But on the whole it was not creative or imaginative; its emotions, if it had any, were very well controlled. The verse of the period had much of it been written by narrow men of rank or profession. It reflected their academic training in its affected pedantry, and their town life in its affected pratings about abstract virtue and the thing they were pleased to call "Nature," but had never intimately known. Before Burns, only Thomson in *The Seasons*, Fergusson in his Scottish ballads, Gray in his *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, and Goldsmith in his *Deserted Village* had touched the genuine, untutored life of man or expressed it naturally in verse. During Burns's lifetime this was done by Cowper and especially by William Blake. It is to the glory of Burns that he, more than any of these, recalled to Britain that true feeling before finished form goes to make a poem.

Burns lived when new industries were being started and factories built; when rent and wages and profits were being discussed, and Navigation Laws, taxes, and political representation were the most absorbing topics in Parliament. In France the question was soon to be decided whether or not the noble who made the laws and the peasant who suffered under them were to be men of equal opportunity in trade and equal voice in government. Strong minds had turned their attention from the old topics of history and metaphysics—history was even now making. The individual was coming into prominence; how to aid his material welfare, his education, his moral

ideals, and his happiness, were knotty problems to be solved. For such discussion prose of a strong and masculine type was needed.

Burns, the poet of the people, passed away shortly after the birth of Carlyle. Carlyle, "as an inspirer and awakener," was himself akin to the poet and fitly his biographer.

NOTE.

The poems here quoted, together with those marked * in the Reading List following, include all the poems of Burns mentioned in Carlyle's Essay.

The following key will help the student in the pronunciation of Scotch words:

a } like *a* in *wall*.

ai

ae, always } like *ai* in *air*.

ea, very often

ey like *ei* in *weigh*.

oo } like French *u*, nearly equivalent to
oi } English *we* in *weed*.

ou like English *oo*, as in *moon*.

ance often pronounced *yince*.

ane often pronounced *ince*.

ch } guttural, as in *loch*.

gh }

r is rolled or trilled; *ng*, as in *hanger*, not as in *anger*; the other vowels and consonants are sounded much as in English.

SELECTED POEMS OF BURNS.

WITH SUPPLEMENTARY READING LIST.

POOR MAILIE'S ELEGY.

Written at Lochlea. A ewe had entangled herself in her tether and was lying in a ditch. A boy carried the news to Burns, who was so much amused at the boy's distress that he wrote *The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie* and the following *Elegy*.

LAMENT in rhyme, lament in prose,
Wi' saut¹ tears trickling down your nose;
Our bardie's fate is at a close,
 Past a' remead;²
The last sad cape-stane³ of his woes—
 Poor Mailie's dead!

It's no the loss o' warl's gear,⁴
That could sae⁵ bitter draw the tear,
Or mak our bardie, dowie,⁶ wear
 The mourning weed:
He's lost a friend and neebor dear,
 In Mailie dead.

Through a' the toun she trotted by him;
A lang half-mile she could descry him;
Wi' kindly bleat, when she did spy him,
 She ran wi' speed:
A friend mair⁷ faithfu' ne'er cam nigh him
 Than Mailie dead.

¹ Salt.

⁴ World's goods.

² Remedy.

⁵ So.

³ Top stone (of a building).

⁶ Worn with grief.

⁷ More.

I wat⁸ she was a sheep o' sense,
 And could behave hersel wi' mense:⁹
 I'll say 't she never brak a fence,
 Through thievish greed.
 Our bardie, lanely, keeps the spence¹⁰
 Sin' Mailie's dead.

Or, if he wanders up the howe,¹¹
 Her living image in her yowe¹²
 Comes bleating to him, owre¹³ the knowe,¹⁴
 For bits o' bread;
 And down the briny pearls rowe¹⁵
 For Mailie dead.

She was nae get¹⁶ o' moorland tips,¹⁷
 Wi' tawted ket,¹⁸ and hairy hips,
 For her forbears were brought in ships
 Frae yont¹⁹ the Tweed:
 A bonnier fleesh ne'er crossed the clips²⁰
 Than Mailie dead.

Wae²¹ worth the man wha first did shape
 That vile, wanchancie²² thing—a rape!
 It makes guid fellows girn²³ and gape,
 Wi' chokin' dread;
 And Robin's bonnet wave wi' crape,
 For Mailie dead.

O a' ye bards on bonny Doon!
 And wha on Ayr your chanter's²⁴ tune!
 Come, join the melancholious croon
 O' Robin's reed!
 His heart will never get aboon²⁵—
 His Mailie's dead!

⁸ Know.	⁹ Discretion.	¹⁰ Inner room.	¹¹ Hollow, or dell.	¹² Ewe.
¹³ Over.	¹⁴ Knoll.	¹⁵ Roll.	¹⁶ Child.	¹⁷ Rams.
¹⁸ Matted fleece.	¹⁹ Yonder, beyond.	²⁰ Wool-shears.		
²¹ Woe.	²² Unlucky.	²³ Writhe in anger.	²⁴ Bagpipes.	²⁵ Above.

A WINTER NIGHT.

Written in 1785 or '86, at Mossiel.

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
 That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm!
 How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
 Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you,
 From seasons such as these?

—SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN biting Boreas, fell and doure,¹
 Sharp shivers thro' the leafless bow'r;
 When Phoebus gies a short-liv'd glow'r,
 Far south the lift,²
 Dim-dark'ning thro' the flaky show'r,
 Or whirling drift;

Ae night the storm the steeples rocked,
 Poor Labour sweet in sleep was locked,
 While burns,³ wi' snawy wreaths⁴ up-choked,
 Wild-eddying swirl,
 Or thro' the mining outlet bocked,⁵
 Down headlong hurl.

List'ning, the doors an' winnocks⁶ rattle,
 I thought me on the ourie⁷ cattle,
 Or silly⁸ sheep, wha bide this brattle⁹
 O' winter war,
 And thro' the drift, deep-lairing,¹⁰ sprattle,¹¹
 Beneath a scar.¹²

Ilk¹³ happing bird, wee, helpless thing!
 That, in the merry months o' spring,
 Delighted me to hear thee sing,
 What comes o' thee?

Whare wilt thou cow'r thy chittering¹⁴ wing
 An' close thy e'e?

¹ Keen and stern. ² Sky. ³ Small streams. ⁴ Drifted heaps of snow.
⁵ Sent out in gushes. ⁶ Windows. ⁷ Shivering. ⁸ Helpless. ⁹ Fury.
¹⁰ Deep-wading. ¹¹ Scramble. ¹² Protruding rock. ¹³ Each. ¹⁴ Trembling.

Ev'n you on murd'ring errands toil'd,
 Lone from your savage homes exil'd,
 The blood-stain'd roost, and sheep-cote spoil'd
 My heart forgets,
 While pitiless the tempest wild
 Sore on you beats.

Now Phœbe,¹⁵ in her midnight reign,
 Dark muffled, view'd the dreary plain;
 Still crowding thoughts, a pensive train,
 Rose in my soul,
 When on my ear this plaintive strain,
 Slow, solemn, stole—

“Blow, blow, ye winds, with heavier gust!
 And freeze, thou bitter-biting frost!
 Descend, ye chilly, smothering snows!
 Not all your rage, as now united, shows
 More hard unkindness, unrelenting,
 Vengeful malice, unrepenting,
 Than heav'n-illumin'd man on brother man bestows!”

“See stern Oppression's iron grip,
 Or mad Ambition's gory hand,
 Sending, like blood-hounds from the slip
 Woe, want, and murder o'er a land!
 Ev'n in the peaceful rural vale,
 Truth, weeping, tells the mournful tale,
 How pamper'd Luxury, Flattery by her side,
 The parasite empoisoning her ear,
 With all the servile wretches in the rear,
 Looks o'er proud property, extended wide;

¹⁵ The moon.

¹⁶ Cf. “Blow, blow, thou winter wind;
 Thou art not so unkind
 As man's ingratitude.

Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky;
 Thou dost not bite so nigh
 As benefits forgot.”

—As You Like It, II, vii.

And eyes the simple rustic hind,
 Whose toil upholds the glitt'ring show,
 A creature of another kind,
 Some coarser substance, unrefin'd,
 Plac'd for her lordly use thus far, thus vile, below.

.

"Oh ye! who, sunk in beds of down,
 Feel not a want but what yourselves create,
 Think, for a moment, on his wretched fate,
 Whom friends and fortune quite disown!
 Ill-satisfied keen nature's clam'rous call,
 Stretch'd on his straw he lays himself to sleep,
 While through the ragged roof and chinky wall,
 Chill o'er his slumbers, piles the drift'ry heap!
 Think on the dungeon's grim confine,
 Where guilt and poor misfortune pine!
 Guilt, erring man, relenting view!
 But shall thy legal rage pursue
 The wretch, already crushèd low,
 By cruel fortune's undeservèd blow?
 Affliction's sons are brothers in distress;
 A brother to relieve, how exquisite the bliss!"

I heard nae mair, for Chanticleer
 Shook off the pouthery¹⁷ snaw,
 And hail'd the morning with a cheer,
 A cottage-rousing crow.

But deep this truth impress'd my mind:
 Through all His works abroad,
 The heart benevolent and kind
 The most resembles God.

¹⁷ Powdery.

TO A MOUSE.

ON TURNING HER UP IN HER NEST WITH THE PLOUGH,
NOVEMBER, 1785.

Burns's brother Gilbert says that this poem was composed in the field and was afterwards read to the man who was assisting Burns when the incident occurred.

WEE, sleekit¹ cow'rin, tim'rous beastie,
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi' bickering brattle!²
I wad be laith³ to rin an' chase thee,
Wi' murd'ring pattle!⁴

I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle,
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whiles, but thou mayst thieve;
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen icker in a thrave⁵
'S a sma' request;
I'll get a blessin' wi' the lave,⁶
And never miss 't!

Thy wee bit housie, too, in ruin!
Its silly wa's⁷ the win's are strewin'!
And naething now to big⁸ a new ane
O' foggage⁹ green,
And bleak December's winds ensuin',
Baith snell¹⁰ and keen!

¹ Sleek.² Hasty clatter.³ Loath.⁴ Stick used to clear away the clods from the plough.⁵ An occasional ear of corn in a *thrave*, that is, in twenty-four sheaves.⁶ The rest.⁷ Helpless walls.⁸ Build.⁹ Moss.¹⁰ Both sharp.

Thou saw the fields laid bare and waste,
 And weary winter comin' fast,
 And cozie here, beneath the blast,
 Thou thought to dwell,
 Till, crash! the cruel coulter passed
 Out through thy cell.

That wee bit heap o' leaves and stibble
 Hast cost thee monie a weary nibble!
 Now thou's turned out for a' thy trouble,
 But¹¹ house or hald,¹²
 To thole¹³ the winter's sleety dribble,
 And cranreuch cauld!¹⁴

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane,¹⁵
 In proving foresight may be vain:
 The best-laid schemes o' mice and men
 Gang aft a-gley,¹⁶
 And lea'e us nought but grief and pain,
 For promised joy.

Still thou art blest, compared wi' me!
 The present only toucheth thee:
 But, och! I backward cast my e'e
 On prospects drear!
 And forward, though I canna see,
 I guess and fear.

¹¹ Without.¹⁴ Hear-frost cold.¹² House or abiding place¹⁵ Not thyself alone.¹³ Endure.¹⁶ Go often wrong.

THE COTTER'S SATURDAY NIGHT.

INSCRIBED TO ROBERT AIKEN, ESQ.

"Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
 Their homely joys and destiny obscure;
 Nor grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile
 The short and simple annals of the poor."—GRAY.

He had frequently remarked to me that he thought there was something peculiarly venerable in the phrase, "Let us worship God," used by the sober head of the family introducing family-worship. To this sentiment of the author the world is indebted for the poem. The plan and title were suggested by Fergusson's "Farmer's Ingle." On one of our Sunday walks he repeated the poem to me.—ADAPTED FROM GILBERT BURNS'S ACCOUNT.

My loved, my honoured, much respected friend!
 No mercenary bard his homage pays;
 With honest pride, I scorn each selfish end;
 My dearest meed, a friend's esteem and praise.
 To you I sing, in simple Scottish lays,
 The lowly train in life's sequestered scene;
 The native feelings strong, the guileless ways;
 What Aiken¹ in a cottage would have been:
 Ah! though his worth unknown, far happier there, I
 ween!

November chill blows loud wi' angry sugh;²
 The short'ning winter-day is near a close;
 The miry beasts retreating frae the pleugh;³
 The black'ning trains o' craws to their repose:
 The toil-worn cotter frae his labour goes,—
 This night his weekly moil⁴ is at an end,—
 Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,
 Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
 And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward
 bend.

¹ A "writer," of whom Burns wrote in 1786, "My chief patron now is Mr. Aiken, in Ayr, who is pleased to express great approbation of my works."

² Moan.

³ Plough.

⁴ Toll.

At length his lonely cot appears in view,
 Beneath the shelter of an aged tree;
 Th' expectant wee things, toddlin', stacher⁵ through
 To meet their dad, wi' flichterin'⁶ noise and glee.
 His wee bit ingle,⁷ blinking bonnily,
 His clean hearthstane, his thriftie wifie's smile,
 The lisping infant prattling on his knee,
 Does a' his weary carking⁸ cares beguile,
 And makes him quite forget his labour and his toil.

Belyve,⁹ the elder bairns come drapping in,
 At service out, amang the farmers roun':
 Some ca'¹⁰ the pleugh, some herd, some tentie¹¹ rin
 A cannie¹² errand to a neebor town;
 Their eldest hope, their Jenny, woman grown,
 In youthfu' bloom, love sparkling in her e'e,
 Comes hame, perhaps to shew a braw¹³ new gown,
 Or deposit her sair-won¹⁴ penny-fee,
 To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be.

Wi' joy unfeigned, brothers and sisters meet,
 And each for other's weelfare kindly spiers:¹⁵
 The social hours, swift-winged, unnoticed fleet;
 Each tells the uncoss¹⁶ that he sees or hears;
 The parents, partial, eye their hopeful years;
 Anticipation forward points the view.
 The mother, wi' her needle and her shears,
 Gars¹⁷ auld claes look amaisht as weel's the new;
 The father mixes a' wi' admonition due.

Their master's and their mistress's command,
 The youngers a' are warnèd to obey;
 And mind their labours wi' an eydent¹⁸ hand,
 And ne'er, though out o' sight, to jauk¹⁹ or play:
 "And oh! be sure to fear the Lord alway!

⁵ Stagger.⁶ Fluttering.⁷ Small fire.⁸ Anxious.⁹ Presently.¹⁰ Drive.¹¹ Careful, attentive.¹² Careful.¹³ Fine.¹⁴ Hard-earned.¹⁵ Asks.¹⁶ News.¹⁷ Makes.¹⁸ Diligent.¹⁹ To trifle.

And mind your duty, duly, morn and night!
 Lest in temptation's path ye gang astray,
 Implore His counsel and assisting might:
 They never sought in vain that sought the Lord aright!"

But, hark! a rap comes gently to the door;
 Jenny, wha kens²⁰ the meaning o' the same,
 Tells how a neebor lad cam o'er the moor,
 To do some errands, and convoy her hame.
 The wily mother sees the conscious flame
 Sparkle in Jenny's e'e, and flush her cheek,
 Wi' heart-struck anxious care inquires his name,
 While Jenny hafflins²¹ is afraid to speak;
 Weel pleased the mother hears it's nae wild, worthless
 rake.

Wi' kindly welcome, Jenny brings him ben;²²
 A strappin' youth; he tak's the mother's eye;
 Blythe Jenny sees the visit's no ill-ta'en;
 The father cracks²³ of horses, pleughs, and kye.²⁴
 The youngster's artless heart o'erflows wi' joy,
 But blate and laithfu',²⁵ scarce can weel behave;
 The mother, wi' a woman's wiles, can spy
 What makes the youth sae bashfu' and sae grave;
 Weel pleased to think her bairn's respected like the lave.²⁶

O happy love! where love like this is found!
 O heart-felt raptures!—bliss beyond compare!
 I've pacèd much this weary, mortal round,
 And sage experience bids me this declare—
 If Heaven a draught of heavenly pleasure spare,
 One cordial in this melancholy vale,
 'Tis when a youthful, loving, modest pair
 In other's arms breathe out the tender tale,
 Beneath the milk-white thorn that scents the ev'ning
 gale.

²⁰ Knows.²¹ Partly.²² Into the parlour.²³ Converses.²⁴ Cows.²⁵ Bashful and shy.²⁶ Rest, others.

But now the supper crowns their simple board,—
 The healsome parritch,²⁷ chief o' Scotia's food;
 The soupe their only hawkie²⁸ does afford,
 That 'yont the hallan²⁹ snugly chows her cood:
 The dame brings forth, in complimentary mood,
 To grace the lad, her weel-hain'd kebbuck, fell,³⁰
 And aft he's prest, and aft he ca's it guid;
 The frugal wifie, garrulous, will tell,
 How 'twas a towmont³¹ auld, sin' lint was i' the bell.³²

The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
 They, round the ingle,³³ form a circle wide;
 The sire turns o'er, with patriarchal grace,
 The big ha' ³⁴ Bible, ance his father's pride;
 His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
 His lyart haffets³⁵ wearing thin and bare;
 Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
 He wales³⁶ a portion with judicious care;
 And "Let us worship God!" he says, with solemn air.

They chant their artless notes in simple guise;
 They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim;
 Perhaps *Dundee's* wild-warbling measures rise,
 Or plaintive *Martyrs*, worthy of the name,
 Or noble *Elgin*³⁷ beets³⁸ the heavenward flame,
 The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays:
 Compared with these, Italian trills are tame;
 The tickled ears no heartfelt raptures raise;
 Nae unison hae they with our Creator's praise.

²⁷ Healthful porridge. ²⁸ Cow. "Soupe" drink (milk or milk broth).

²⁹ Beyond the partition wall.

³⁰ Well saved cheese, seasoned.

³¹ Twelvemonth.

³² Flax was in the flower.

³³ Fireplace.

³⁴ Hall, or house; that is, "family."

³⁵ Gray (locks on the) temples.

³⁶ Chooses.

³⁷ *Dundee*, *Martyrs*, and *Elgin* are the names of old hymn-tunes found in many books. The adjectives applied to each are peculiarly fitting.

³⁸ Adds fuel to.

The priest-like father reads the sacrèd page—
 How Abram was the friend of God on high;
 Or Moses bade eternal warfare wage
 With Amalek's ungracious progeny;
 Or how the royal bard did groaning lie
 Beneath the stroke of Heaven's avenging ire;
 Or Job's pathetic plaint, and wailing cry;
 Or rapt Isaiah's wild, seraphic fire;
 Or other holy seers that tune the sacred lyre.

Perhaps the Christian volume is the theme—
 How guiltless blood for guilty man was shed;
 How HE, who bore in heaven the second name,
 Had not on earth whereon to lay His head;
 How His first followers and servants sped;
 The precepts sage they wrote to many a land;
 How he, who lone in Patmos banishèd,³⁹
 Saw in the sun a mighty angel stand,
 And heard great Bab'lon's doom pronounced by Heaven's
 command.

Then kneeling down, to Heaven's Eternal King,
 The saint, the father, and the husband prays:
 Hope "springs exulting on triumphant wing,"⁴⁰
 That thus they all shall meet in future days;
 There ever bask in uncreated rays,
 No more to sigh, or shed the bitter tear,
 Together hymning their Creator's praise,
 In such society, yet still more dear,
 While circling Time moves round in an eternal sphere.

Compared with this, how poor Religion's pride,
 In all the pomp of method and of art,
 When men display to congregations wide
 Devotion's ev'ry grace, except the heart!
 The Power, incensed, the pageant will desert,

³⁹ Saint John.

⁴⁰ Quoted from Pope's *Windsor Forest*.

The pompous strain, the sacerdotal stole;
But haply, in some cottage far apart,
May hear, well pleased, the language of the soul;
And in His book of life the inmates poor enrol.

Then homeward all take off their several way;
The youngling cottagers retire to rest:
The parent-pair their secret homage pay,
And proffer up to Heaven the warm request,
That He who stills the raven's clamorous nest,
And decks the lily fair in flowery pride,
Would, in the way His wisdom sees the best,
For them and for their little ones provide;
But chiefly, in their hearts with grace divine preside

From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,
That makes her loved at home, revered abroad:
Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
"An honest man's the noblest work of God";^a
And certes, in fair Virtue's heavenly road,
The cottage leaves the palace far behind.
What is a lordling's pomp?—a cumbrous load,
Disguising oft the wretch of human kind,
Studied in arts of hell, in wickedness refined!

O Scotia! my dear, my native soil!
For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent,
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content!
And oh! may Heaven their simple lives prevent
From luxury's contagion, weak and vile!
Then, howe'er crowns and coronets be rent,
A virtuous populace may rise the while,
And stand a wall of fire around their much-loved isle.

^a Quoted from Pope's *Essay on Man*.

O Thou! who poured the patriotic tide,
 That streamed through Wallace's ²undaunted heart,
 Who dared to nobly stem tyrannic pride,
 Or nobly die, the second glorious part,
 (The patriot's God, peculiarly Thou art,
 His friend, inspirer, guardian and reward!)

O never, never, Scotia's realm desert;
 But still the patriot, and the patriot-bard
 In bright succession raise, her ornament and guard!

TO A MOUNTAIN DAISY.

ON TURNING ONE DOWN WITH THE PLOUGH IN APRIL, 1786.

Originally titled "The Gowan," the Scotch name of the flower.

WEE, modest, crimson-tippèd flow'r,
 Thou's met me in an evil hour:
 For I maun ¹ crush amang the stoure ²
 Thy slender stem:
 To spare thee now is past my pow'r,
 Thou bonnie gem.

Alas! it's no thy neebor sweet,
 The bonnie lark, companion meet!
 Bending thee 'mang the dewy weet! ³
 Wi' spreckl'd breast,
 When upward-springing, blythe, to greet
 The purpling east.

Cauld blew the bitter-biting north
 Upon thy early, humble birth;
 Yet cheerfully thou glinted ⁴ forth
 Amid the storm,
 Scarce rear'd above the parent earth
 Thy tender form.

² William Wallace, who led the Scotch against the English in the last years of the thirteenth century.

¹ Must.

² Dust.

³ Wet.

⁴ Peeped.

The flaunting flow'rs our gardens yield,
 High shelt'ring woods and wa's⁵ maun shield,
 But thou, beneath the random bield⁶

O' clod or stane,
 Adorns the histie⁷ stibble-field,
 Unseen, alane.

There, in thy scanty mantle clad,
 Thy snawie bosom sunward spread,
 Thou lifts thy unassuming head

In humble guise;
 But now the share uptears thy bed,
 And low thou lies!

Such is the fate of simple bard,
 On life's rough ocean luckless starr'd!
 Unskilful he to note the card⁸

Of prudent lore,
 Till billows rage, and gales blow hard,
 And whelm him o'er!

Such fate to suffering worth is giv'n,
 Who long with wants and woes has striv'n,
 By human pride or cunning driv'n

To misery's brink,
 Till wrenched of every stay but Heav'n,
 He, ruined, sink!

Even thou who mourn'st the Daisy's fate,
 That fate is thine—no distant date;
 Stern Ruin's ploughshare drives, elate,
 Full on thy bloom,
 Till crushed beneath the furrow's weight
 Shall be thy doom.

⁵ Walls.
⁷ Barren.

⁶ Shelter.
⁸ Sailor's chart.

A BARD'S EPITAPH.

Written at Mossiel, 1786.

Is there a whim-inspirèd fool,
Owre¹ fast for thought, owre hot for rule,
Owre blate² to seek, owre proud to snool,³
Let him draw near;
And owre this grassy heap sing dool,⁴
And drap a tear.

Is there a bard of rustic song,
Who, noteless, steals the crowds among,
That weekly this area throng,
O pass not by!
But, with a frater-feeling strong,
Here heave a sigh.

Is there a man whose judgment clear
Can others teach the course to steer,
Yet runs himself life's mad career,
Wild as the wave;
Here pause—and, through the starting tear,
Survey this grave.

The poor inhabitant below
Was quick to learn, and wise to know,
And keenly felt the friendly glow,
And softer flame;
But thoughtless follies laid him low,
And stained his name!

Reader, attend—whether thy soul
Soars fancy's flights beyond the pole,
Or darkling grubs this earthly hole,
In low pursuit;
Know, prudent, cautious self-control
Is wisdom's root.

¹ Over.

² Bashful.

³ To give up weakly.

⁴ Sorrow.

THE GLOOMY NIGHT IS GATHERING FAST.

Tune—"Roslin Castle."

Written one cheerless night on the eve of his departure for the Indies. He firmly believed that this would be the last song that he should ever write in Scotland.

THE gloomy night is gathering fast,
 Loud roars the wild inconstant blast;
 Yon murky cloud is foul with rain,
 I see it driving o'er the plain;
 The hunter now has left the moor,
 The scattered coveys meet secure;
 While here I wander, pressed with care,
 Along the lonely banks of Ayr.

The Autumn mourns her rip'ning corn,
 By early Winter's ravage torn;
 Across her placid, azure sky,
 She sees the scowling tempest fly;
 Chill runs my blood to hear it rave—
 I think upon the stormy wave,
 Where many a danger I must dare,
 Far from the bonnie banks of Ayr.

'Tis not the surging billow's roar,
 'Tis not that fatal deadly shore;
 Though death in ev'ry shape appear,
 The wretched have no more to fear!
 But round my heart the ties are bound,
 That heart transpierced with many a wound:
 These bleed afresh, those ties I tear,
 To leave the bonnie banks of Ayr.

Farewell old Coila's¹ hills and dales,
 Her heathy moors and winding vales;
 The scenes where wretched fancy roves,
 Pursuing past, unhappy loves!
 Farewell, my friends! farewell, my foes!
 My peace with these, my love with those—
 The bursting tears my heart declare;
 Farewell the bonnie banks of Ayr!

¹ The district Kyle in Ayrshire.

MACPHERSON'S FAREWELL.

Tune—"Macpherson's Rant."

One of the acknowledged contributions that Burns made to Thomson's *Museum of Scottish Song*, while he was confined to his bed by an accident during his second visit to Edinburgh.

James Macpherson was a noted Highland freebooter, of uncommon personal strength, and an excellent performer on the violin. After a number of years, he was seized by Duff of Braco, ancestor of the Earl of Fife; was tried, and was sentenced to death. In the prison he composed a song and an appropriate air. . . . When brought to the place of execution . . . he played the tune on his violin, and then asked if any friend was present who would accept the instrument as a gift at his hands. No one coming forward, he indignantly broke the violin on his knee and threw away the fragments. . . . His sword, which is still preserved at Duff House . . . is an instrument of great length and weight. Burns's verse preserves the air of the old song.

FAREWELL, ye dungeons dark and strong,
 The wretch's destinie!
 Macpherson's time will not be long
 On yonder gallows-tree.
 Sae rantingly,¹ sae wantonly,
 Sae dauntingly gaed² he;
 He play'd a spring³ and danc'd it round,
 Below the gallows-tree.

Oh, what is death but parting breath?
 On monie a bloody plain
 I've dar'd his face, and in this place
 I scorn him yet again!

Untie these bands from off my hands,
 And bring to me my sword;
 And there's no man in all Scotland,
 But I'll brave him at a word.

I've liv'd a life of sturt⁴ and strife;
 I die by treacherie:
 It burns my heart I must depart,
 And not avengèd be.

¹ Joyously.

² Went.

³ A quick air, a Scottish reel.

⁴ Trouble.

Now farewell light—thou sunshine bright,
 And all beneath the sky!
 May coward shame disdain his name,
 The wretch that dares not die!
 Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,
 Sae dauntingly gaed he;
 He play'd a spring and danc'd it round
 Below the gallows-tree.

TO MARY IN HEAVEN.

Tune—"Miss Forbes's Farewell to Banff."

After the parents of Jean Armour had insisted upon her leaving Burns, he became acquainted with Mary Campbell, a Highland lassie. Out of this grew an engagement to marry. In May, 1786, she went back to her home to make preparations for their marriage. Their parting on the banks of the Ayr is thus described: They "stood on each side of a purling brook; they laved their hands in the limpid stream, and holding a Bible between them, pronounced their vows to be faithful to each other." Then they exchanged Bibles and parted. In October of this year, before Burns had even learned that she was sick, Mary Campbell died. Three years after her death Burns wrote this poem. In 1791, he wrote "Flow Gently Sweet Afton"; and in 1792, on the anniversary of her death, "Highland Mary."

THOU ling'ring star, with less'ning ray,
 That lov'st to greet the early morn,
 Again thou usherest in the day
 My Mary from my soul was torn.
 O Mary! dear departed shade!
 Where is thy place of blissful rest?
 Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
 Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?
 That sacred hour can I forget,
 Can I forget the hallowed grove,
 Where by the winding Ayr we met,
 To live one day of parting love?
 Eternity cannot efface
 Those records dear of transports past;
 Thy image at our last embrace—
 Ah! little thought we 't was our last!

Ayr, gurgling, kissed his pebbled shore,
 O'erhung with wild woods, thick'ning green;
 The fragrant birch and hawthorn hoar
 Twined am'rous round the raptured scene;
 The flow'rs sprang wanton to be prest,
 The birds sang love on every spray—
 Till too, too soon, the glowing west
 Proclaimed the speed of wingèd day.

Still o'er these scenes my mem'ry wakes,
 And fondly broods with miser care;
 Time but th' impression deeper makes,
 As streams their channels deeper wear.
 My Mary! dear departed shade!
 Where is thy place of blissful rest?
 Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
 Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

ON SEEING A WOUNDED HARE LIMP BY ME.

The son of a neighbor had shot a hare out of season, and the poor wounded "beastie" ran past Burns as he was at work in the fields at Ellisland. Note that the poem is composed in pure English.

INHUMAN man! curse on thy barb'rous art,
 And blasted be thy murder-aiming eye;
 May never pity soothe thee with a sigh,
 Nor ever pleasure glad thy cruel heart!

Go live, poor wanderer of the wood and field,
 The bitter little that of life remains;
 No more the thickening brakes and verdant plains
 To thee shall home, or food, or pastime yield.

Seek, mangled wretch, some place of wonted rest,
 No more of rest, but now thy dying bed!
 The sheltering rushes whistling o'er thy head,
 The cold earth with thy bloody bosom prest.

Perhaps a mother's anguish adds its woe;
 The playful pair crowd fondly by thy side;
 Ah, helpless nurslings, who will now provide
 That life a mother only can bestow!

Oft as by winding Nith, I, musing, wait
 The sober eve, or hail the cheerful dawn,
 I'll miss thee sporting o'er the dewy lawn,
 And curse the ruffian's aim, and mourn thy hapless fate.

TAM O' SHANTER.

The work of one day. Burns had asked Captain Grose, then (1790) at work on *The Antiquities of Scotland*, to make a drawing of Alloway Kirk, saying that it was the scene of many witch stories. Captain Grose consented on condition that Burns write some verses to accompany the engraving. The original of Tam was Douglas Graham, a Carrick farmer, "a worthy and upright member of society." Kate was his wife, whose maiden name had been Helen Taggart; she was "unusually subject to superstitious beliefs and fears. . . . To his dying day, he (Graham) nothing loath, passed among his rural compeers by the name of Tam o' Shanter."

WHEN chapman billies¹ leave the street,
 And drouthy² neebors neebors meet,
 As market-days are wearing late,
 And folk begin to tak the gate;
 While we sit bousing at the nappy,³
 And gettin' fou⁴ and unco⁵ happy,
 We think na on the lang Scots miles,
 The mosses, waters, slaps,⁶ and stiles,
 That lie between us and our hame,
 Where sits our sulky, sullen dame,
 Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
 Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

This truth fand⁷ honest Tam o' Shanter,
 As he frae Ayr ae night did canter,
 (Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses
 For honest men and bonny lasses).

¹ Packman fellows.

⁴ Full.

² Thirsty.

⁵ Very.

³ Making merry over the ale.

⁶ Gates.

⁷ Found.

O Tam! hadst thou but been sae wise,
 As ta'en thy ain wife Kate's advice!
 She tauld thee weel thou wast a skellum,⁸
 A blethering,⁹ blustering, drunken blellum;¹⁰
 That frae November till October,
 Ae market-day thou wasna sober;
 That ilka ruelder,¹¹ wi' the miller,
 Thou sat as lang as thou had siller;¹²
 That every naig was ca'd¹³ a shoe on,
 The smith and thee gat roaring fou on;
 That at the Lord's house, ev'n on Sunday,
 Thou drank wi' Kirkton Jean¹⁴ till Monday.
 She prophesied that, late or soon,
 Thou would be found deep drowned in Doon,
 Or caught wi' warlocks i' the mirk,
 By Alloway's auld haunted kirk.

Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,¹⁵
 To think how monie counsels sweet,
 How monie lengthened sage advices,
 The husband frae the wife despises!

But to our tale:—Ae market-night,
 Tam had got planted unco right,
 Fast by an ingle¹⁶ bleezing¹⁷ finely,
 Wi' reaming swats¹⁸ that drank divinely;
 And at his elbow, Souter¹⁹ Johnny,
 His ancient, trusty, drouthy crony;
 Tam lo'ed him like a vera brither—
 They had been fou for weeks thegither!

⁸ Nolsy, reckless fellow.

⁹ Foolish tongued.

¹⁰ Talkative fellow.

¹¹ Every load of grain sent to the mill.

¹² Silver, money.

¹³ Driven.

¹⁴ The Kirkton is the name given in Scotland to the village where the parish church is situated. One John Kennedy, who kept a public house, is here meant by Kirkton Jean.

¹⁵ Makes me weep.

¹⁶ Fire.

¹⁷ Blazing.

¹⁸ Frothing ale.

¹⁹ Cobbler. "Souter Johnny" is supposed to have been John Davidson, a shoemaker, who, with Tam and his wife, lies buried in Kirkcaldy Kirkyard.

The night drave on wi' sangs an' clatter,
 And aye the ale was growing better;
 The landlady and Tam grew gracious,
 Wi' favours secret, sweet, and precious;
 The souter tauld his queerest stories,
 The landlord's laugh was ready chorus;
 The storm without might rair and rustle—
 Tam did na mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,
 E'en drowned himself amang the nappy!
 As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,
 The minutes winged their way wi' pleasure:
 Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
 O'er a' the ills o' life victorious.

But pleasures are like poppies spread—
 You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
 Or like the snowfall in the river—
 A moment white, then melts forever;
 Or like the borealis race,
 That flit ere you can point their place;
 Or like the rainbow's lovely form,
 Evanishing amid the storm.
 Nae man can tether time or tide;
 The hour approaches Tam maun²⁰ ride;
 That hour, o' night's black arch the keystone,
 That dreary hour he mounts his beast in;
 And sic²¹ a night he tak's the road in
 As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.

The wind blew as 'twad²² blawn its last;
 The rattling show'rs rose on the blast;
 The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd;
 Loud, deep, and lang the thunder bellow'd:
 That night, a child might understand,
 The Deil had business on his hand.

²⁰ Must.²¹ Such.²² Would have.

Weel mounted on his gray mare, Meg,
 (A better never lifted leg)
 Tam skelpit²³ on through dub²⁴ and mire,
 Despising wind, and rain, and fire;
 Whiles holding fast his guid blue bonnet,
 Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet;
 Whiles glowering round wi' prudent cares,
 Lest bogles²⁵ catch him unawares.
 Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,
 Where ghaists and houlets²⁶ nightly cry.—

By this time he was cross the foord,
 Where in the snaw the chapman smooored;²⁷
 And past the birks²⁸ and meikle²⁹ stane,
 Where drunken Charlie brak's neck-bane;³⁰
 And through the whins,³¹ and by the cairn,³²
 Where hunters fand the murdered bairn;³³
 And near the thorn, aboon the well,
 Where Mungo's mither hanged hersel'.

Before him Doon³⁴ pours all his floods;
 The doubling storm roars through the woods;
 The lightnings flash from pole to pole;
 Near and more near the thunders roll;
 When, glimmering through the groaning trees,
 Kirk-Alloway seemed in a bleeze;
 Through ilka bore³⁵ the beams were glancing,
 And loud resounded mirth and dancing.

Inspiring, bold John Barleycorn,³⁶
 What dangers thou canst make us scorn!
 Wi' tippenny,³⁷ we fear nae evil;
 Wi' usquebae,³⁸ we'll face the devil!

²³ Struck ahead.²⁴ Pool of rain water.²⁵ Goblins.²⁶ Ghosts and owls.²⁷ Smothered.²⁸ Birches.²⁹ Huge.³⁰ Broke his collar bone.³¹ Strata of hard rock (from which probably the road was hewn).³² Pile of stones.³³ Child.³⁴ The river Doon flows into the sea at Ayr.³⁵ Hole in the wall, cranny.³⁶ Burns's name for any fermented malt drink.³⁷ Two cents, English.³⁸ Whiskey.

The swats sae reamed in Tammie's noddle,
 Fair play, he cared na deils a boddle.³⁹
 But Maggie stood right sair astonished,
 Till, by the heel and hand admonished,
 She ventured forward on the light;
 And, vow! Tam saw an unco⁴⁰ sight!
 Warlocks and witches in a dance;
 Nae cotillion brent⁴¹ new frae France,
 But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
 Put life and mettle in their heels:
 A winnock-bunker⁴² in the east,
 There sat auld Nick, in shape o' beast;
 A towzie tyke,⁴³ black, grim, and large,
 To gie them music was his charge;
 He screwed the pipes and gart them skirl,⁴⁴
 Till roof and rafters a' did dirl.⁴⁵
 Coffins stood round, like open presses,
 That shawed the dead in their last dresses;
 And by some devilish cantrip⁴⁶ slight
 Each in its cauld hand held a light,
 By which heroic Tam was able
 To note upon the haly⁴⁷ table,
 A murderer's banes in gibbet airns;⁴⁸
 Twa span-lang, wee unchristened bairns;
 A thief, new-cutted frae the rape,
 Wi' his last gasp his gab⁴⁹ did gape;
 Five tomahawks, wi' bluid red-rusted;
 Five scimitars, wi' murder crusted;
 A garter, which a babe had strangled;
 A knife, a father's throat had mangled,
 Whom his ain son o' life bereft—
 The gray hairs yet stack to the heft;
 Wi' mair o' horrible and awfu',
 Which even to name wad be unlawfu'!

³⁹ Copper coin (two pennies, Scots).⁴⁰ Strange.⁴¹ Bright.⁴² Window seat.⁴³ Shaggy dog.⁴⁴ Made them (the bagpipes) shriek.⁴⁵ Tremble.⁴⁶ Charm.⁴⁷ Holy.⁴⁸ Irons.⁴⁹ Mouth.

As Tammie glowred,⁵⁰ amazed and curious,
 The mirth and fun grew fast and furious:
 The piper loud and louder blew;
 The dancers quick and quicker flew;
 They reeled, they set, they crossed, they cleekit,⁵¹
 Till ilka carlin⁵² swat and reekit,
 And coost her duddies⁵³ to the wark,
 And linket⁵⁴ at it in her sark!⁵⁵

But Tam kenned what was what fu' brawlie;⁵⁶
 There was ae⁵⁷ winsome wench and walie,⁵⁸
 That night enlisted in the core,⁵⁹
 (Lang after kenned on Carrick shore;
 For monie a beast to dead she shot,
 And perished monie a bonnie boat,
 And shook baith meikle corn and bear,⁶⁰
 And kept the country-side in fear.)
 Her cutty⁶¹ -sark, o' Paisley harn,⁶²
 That while a lassie she had worn,
 In longitude though sorely scanty,
 It was her best, and she was vauntie.
 Ah! little kenned thy reverend grannie
 That sark she coft⁶³ for her wee Nannie,
 Wi' twa pund Scots ('twas a' her riches),
 Wad ever graced a dance o' witches!

But here my Muse her wing maun cour;⁶⁴
 Sic flights are far beyond her power;—
 To sing how Nannie lap and flang⁶⁵
 (A souple jade she was, and strang),
 And how Tam stood like ane bewitched,
 And thought his very e'en enriched;
 Even Satan glowred and fidget fu' fain,⁶⁶
 And hotched⁶⁷ and blew wi' might and main;

⁵⁰ Stared.⁵¹ Checked.⁵² Old stout woman.⁵³ Cast off her ragged outer garment.⁵⁴ Tripped, danced.⁵⁵ Undergarment.⁵⁶ Well.⁵⁷ One.⁵⁸ Plump and jolly.⁵⁹ Corps, party.⁶⁰ Barley.⁶¹ Short.⁶² Very coarse linen.⁶³ Bought.⁶⁴ Clip.⁶⁵ Leaped and flung.⁶⁶ Full, joyously.⁶⁷ Blended (the notes).

Till first ae caper, syne⁶⁶ anither,
 Tam tint⁶⁶ his reason a' thegither,
 And roars out, "Weel done, Cutty-sark!"
 And in an instant all was dark.
 And scarcely had he Maggie rallied,
 When out the hellish legion sallied.
 As bees bizz out wi' angry fyke,⁷⁰
 When plundering herds assail their byke;⁷¹
 As open pussie's⁷² mortal foes,
 When, pop! she starts before their nose;
 As eager runs the market-crowd,
 When "Catch the thief!" resounds aloud;
 So Maggie runs, the witches follow,
 Wi' monie an eldritch⁷³ screech and hollow.

Ah, Tam! ah, Tam! thou'll get thy fairin'!⁷⁴
 In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin'!
 In vain thy Kate awaits thy comin';
 Kate soon will be a woefu' woman!
 Now, do thy speedy utmost, Meg,
 And win the keystone o' the brig;⁷⁵
 There at them thou thy tail may toss;
 A running stream they darena cross!
 But ere the keystone she could make,
 The fient a tail she had to shake!⁷⁶
 For Nannie, far before the rest,
 Hard upon noble Maggie prest,
 And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle⁷⁷—
 But little wist she Maggie's mettle!
 Ae spring brought off her master hale,
 But left behind her ain gray tail:

⁶⁶ Then.⁶⁹ Lost.⁷⁰ Fuss.⁷¹ Hive.⁷² Hare.⁷³ Frightful.⁷⁴ Reward.⁷⁵ Bridge, the "auld brig of Ayr."

⁷⁶ "It is a well-known fact that witches, or any evil spirits, have no power to follow a poor wight any further than the middle of the next running-stream. It may be proper likewise to mention to the benighted traveller that, when he falls in with *bogies*, whatever danger may be in his going forward, there is much more hazard in turning back."—Burns.

⁷⁷ Aim

The carlin claught⁷⁸ her by the rump,
And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.

Now, wha this tale o' truth shall read,
Ilk man and mother's son, take heed!
Whene'er to drink you are inclined,
Or cutty-sarks run in your mind,
Think! ye may buy the joys o'er dear—
Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare.

DUNCAN GRAY.

Tune—"Duncan Gray."

Written at Dumfries, in 1792, for Thomson's *Museum*.

"*Duncan Gray* is that kind of light-horse gallop of an air which precludes seriousness. The ludicrous is the leading feature."—BURNS.

DUNCAN GRAY cam here to woo,
Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!
On blithe Yule-night when we were fou',¹
Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!
Maggie coost² her head fu' high,
Looked asklent³ and unco skeigh,⁴
Gart⁵ poor Duncan stand abeigh;⁶
Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!

Duncan fleeched,⁷ and Duncan prayed;
Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!
Meg was deaf as Ailsa Craig,⁸
Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!
Duncan sighed baith out and in,
Grat⁹ his een¹⁰ baith bleert¹¹ and blin',
Spak o' lowpin'¹² owre a linn;¹³
Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!

⁷⁸ Laid hold of.

¹ Full, drunk.

² Cast.

³ Askance.

⁴ Very shy.

⁵ Made.

⁶ Aloof.

⁷ Begged.

⁸ Ailsa Crag, a small island of rock in the Firth of Clyde.

⁹ Wept.

¹⁰ Eyes.

¹¹ Bleared, dim.

¹² Leaping.

¹³ Waterfall.

Time and chance are but a tide,
 Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!
 Slighted love is sair to bide,
 'Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!
 Shall I, like a fool, quoth he,
 For a haughty hizzie die?
 She may gae to—France for me!
 Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!

How it comes let doctors tell,
 Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!
 Meg grew sick as he grew well,
 Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!
 Something in her bosom wrings,
 For relief a sigh she brings;
 And oh, her een, they spak sic things!
 Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!

Duncan was a lad o' grace,
 Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!
 Maggie's was a piteous case,
 Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!
 Duncan couldna be her death,
 Swelling pity smoores¹⁴ his wrath;
 Now they're crouse¹⁵ and cantie¹⁶ baith;
 Ha, ha, the wooing o 't!

BRUCE'S ADDRESS TO HIS MEN AT BANNOCKBURN.

Tune—"Hey, tuttie taitie."

Writing to George Thomson in 1793, Burns says: "This thought (Bruce's march at the battle of Bannockburn) in my yesternight's evening walk, warmed me to a pitch of enthusiasm on the theme of liberty and independence, which I threw into a kind of ode . . . that one might suppose to be the gallant royal

¹⁴ Smothered.

¹⁵ Cheerful.

¹⁶ Merry.

Scot's address to his heroic followers. . . . The recollection of that struggle . . . associated with some struggles not so ancient, roused my rhyming mania." The last remark is believed to refer to the French Revolution.

Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled,
Scots, wham Bruce has aften led,
Welcome to your gory bed,
Or to victory!

Now's the day, and now's the hour;
See the front o' battle lour;
See approach proud Edward's pow'r—
Chains and slavery!

Wha will be a traitor-knave?
Wha can fill a coward's grave?
Wha sae base as be a slave?
Let him turn and flee!

Wha for Scotland's king and law
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
Freeman stand, or freeman fa',
Let him follow me!

By oppression's woes and pains!
By your sons in servile chains!
We will drain our dearest veins,
But they shall be free!

Lay the proud usurpers low!
Tyrants fall in every foe!
Liberty's in every blow!—
Let us do or die!

READING LIST

NOTE.—The poems marked * in the following list are mentioned in Carlyle's Essay.

1773–1784, At Lochlea.

My Nannie O.

Winter. A Dirge.

Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie.

Mary Morrison. A Song.

1784–1786, At Mossgiel.

A Prayer in the Prospect of Death.

Robin. A Song.—Written about the circumstances connected with the poet's birth.

Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet.—Gilbert Burns believed that his suggestion that this would bear printing first suggested to Robert the idea of becoming an author.

Death and Dr. Hornbook. A True Story.

Epistle to John Lapraik.—Expressing his pleasure at hearing the verses in which Lapraik had sung of the happy affection existing between man and wife.

The Twa Herds, or the Holy Tulzie.—The first poem in which he glances satirically at the conflict between the Old and the New Lights.

**Epistle to William Simpson, Ochiltree.*—Written in reply to a versified epistle sent to Burns by William Simpson after the latter had read *The Twa Herds*.

Holy Willie's Prayer.—"A fearless and unshrinking statement of the doctrine of salvation as it was understood by the party satirized [the Old Lights]."—WALKER.

**Halloween.*

**Address to the Deil.*—"The idea was suggested to him by running over in his mind the many ludicrous accounts and representations of this august personage that we have from various quarters."

Man was made to Mourn. A Dirge.—The grief of a father, who believed that his daughter had lost her way, suggested this poem. In his *Commonplace Book*, Burns remarks that the troubles of life operate on all alike.

**The Jolly Beggars. A Cantata.*

Address to the Unco' Guid, or the Rigidly Righteous.

**Scotch Drink.*

The Auld Farmer's New-Year Morning Salutation to his Auld Mare, Maggie.—"The whole toiling life of a ploughman and his horse done off in two or three touches."

The Twa Dogs. A Tale.—"The old controversy between rich and poor."—SHAIRP.

To a Louse, on seeing one on a Lady's Bonnet, at Church.—"A Mauchline incident of a Mauchline lady." The last stanza is proverbial.

**The Holy Fair.* See Introduction, page 12.

**The Brigs of Ayr.*—A humorous controversy between the old and the new bridges over the Ayr.

1786-1788, At Edinburgh.

Bonnie Doon. A Song.

**To the Guidwife of Wauchope House.*—In reply to some appreciative lines from a Mrs. Scott of Wauchope in Roxburghshire.

1788-1791, At Ellisland.

I Love my Jean.—A song in honor of his wife.

Auld Lang Syne. A Song.

My Bonnie Mary, or The Silver Tassie.—Written as a compliment to a young lady who was bidding farewell to a young officer going abroad.

**Willie Brewed a Peck o' Maut. A Song.*

John Anderson my Jo. A Song.

**Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson.*—(In connection with this read Milton's *Lycidas*.)

Afton Water. A Song.

1791-1796, At Dumfries.

Highland Mary. A Song.—The Mary referred to in *To Mary in Heaven* and in *Afton Water*.

Ae Fond Kiss and then We Sever. A Song.—Addressed to a friend in Edinburgh, when Burns heard of her intended departure to the West Indies.

**Ode Sacred to the Memory of Mrs. Oswald.*

Robin Adair. A Song.

Whistle and I'll come to you. A Song.

Dainty Davie.—A new song written to the tune of a merry old Scotch song.

A Man's a Man for A' That.—Written January 1, 1795. Burns's declaration that all men are equal. Inspired by his sympathy with the French Revolution.

The Dumfries Volunteers. A Song.

**Open the Door to Me, Oh*. A Song.

My Nannie's Awa'.—Addressed to the same friend as was *Ae Fond Kiss*.

A Red, Red Rose.—A song written as an improvement on a street ditty.

O Wert Thou in the Cauld Blast.—Written for Jessie Lewars, who assisted Mrs. Burns during the last sickness of Robert Burns.

"Mendelssohn so much admired this song that he composed for it an air of exquisite pathos."—CHAMBERS.

Poem on Pastoral Poetry.—The date of this poem is not definitely known. It fitly closes any list of Burns's poems, as it sums up his conception of pastoral poetry and pays tribute to his predecessors.

BOOKS OF REFERENCE.

THE PERIODS OF CARLYLE AND BURNS.

- J. R. Green, *A Short History of the English People*.
H. D. Traill, *Social England*, Vols. V and VI.
C. W. Oman, *England in the Nineteenth Century*.
Stopford Brooke, *A Primer of English Literature*.
Edmund Gosse, *Modern English Literature*.

CARLYLE.

- J. A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life, 1795-1835*. 2 vols.
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H. A. Taine, *The History of English Literature*.

BURNS.

- Robert Chambers, *Life and Works of Robert Burns* (revised by William Wallace).
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BURNS.¹

1. In the modern arrangements of society, it is no uncommon thing that a man of genius must, like Butler, 'ask for bread and receive a stone'; for, in spite of our grand maxim of supply and demand, it is by no means the highest excellence that men are most forward to recognise. The inventor of a spinning-jenny is pretty sure of his reward in his own day; but the writer of a true poem, like the apostle of a true religion, is nearly as sure of the contrary. We do not know whether it is not an aggravation of the injustice, that there is generally a posthumous retribution. Robert Burns, in the course of Nature, might yet have been living; but his short life was spent in toil and penury; and he died, in the prime of his manhood, miserable and neglected: and yet already a brave mausoleum shines over his dust, and more than one splendid monument has been reared in other places to his fame; the street where he languished in poverty is called by his name; the highest personages in our literature have been proud to appear as his commentators and admirers; and here is the *sixth* narrative of his *Life* that has been given to the world!

2. Mr. Lockhart thinks it necessary to apologise for this new attempt on such a subject: but his readers, we believe, will readily acquit him; or, at worst, will censure

¹ The text followed is that of the English editions of 1839 and 1869.

only the performance of his task, not the choice of it. The character of Burns, indeed, is a theme that cannot easily become either trite or exhausted; and will probably gain rather than lose in its dimensions by the distance to which it is removed by Time. No man, it has been said, is a hero to his valet; and this is probably true; but the fault is at least as likely to be the valet's as the hero's. For it is certain, that to the vulgar eye few things are wonderful that are not distant. It is difficult for men to believe that the man, the mere man whom they see, nay perhaps painfully feel, toiling at their side through the poor jostlings of existence, can be made of finer clay than themselves. Suppose that some dining acquaintance of Sir Thomas Lucy's, and neighbour of John a Combe's, had snatched an hour or two from the preservation of his game, and written us a *Life of Shakspeare*! What dissertations should we not have had,—not on *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, but on the wool-trade, and deer-stealing, and the libel and vagrant laws; and how the Poacher became a Player; and how Sir Thomas and Mr. John had Christian bowels, and did not push him to extremities! In like manner, we believe, with respect to Burns, that till the companions of his pilgrimage, the Honourable Excise Commissioners, and the Gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt,¹ and the Dumfries Aristocracy, and all the Squires and Earls, equally with the Ayr Writers, and the New and Old Light Clergy,² whom he had to do with shall have become invisible in the darkness of the Past, or visible only by light borrowed from *his* juxtaposition, it will be difficult to measure him by any true standard, or to estimate what he really was and did, in the eighteenth century, for his country and the world. It will be difficult, we say; but still a fair problem for lit-

¹ Cf. Introduction, p. 13.

² Cf. Introduction, p. 12.

erary historians; and repeated attempts will give us repeated approximations.

3. His former Biographers have done something, no doubt, but by no means a great deal, to assist us. Dr. Currie and Mr. Walker, the principal of these writers, have both, we think, mistaken one essentially important thing: Their own and the world's true relation to their author, and the style in which it became such men to think and to speak of such a man. Dr. Currie loved the poet truly; more perhaps than he avowed to his readers, or even to himself; yet he everywhere introduces him with a certain patronising, apologetic air; as if the polite public might think it strange and half unwarrantable that he, a man of science, a scholar and gentleman, should do such honour to a rustic. In all this, however, we readily admit that his fault was not want of love, but weakness of faith; and regret that the first and kindest of all our poet's biographers should not have seen farther, or believed more boldly what he saw. Mr. Walker offends more deeply in the same kind: and both err alike in presenting us with a detached catalogue of his several supposed attributes, virtues and vices, instead of a delineation of the resulting character as a living unity. This, however, is not painting a portrait; but gauging the length and breadth of the several features, and jotting down their dimensions in arithmetical ciphers. Nay it is not so much as that: for we are yet to learn by what arts or instruments the mind *could* be so measured and gauged.

4. Mr. Lockhart, we are happy to say, has avoided both these errors. He uniformly treats Burns as the high and remarkable man the public voice has now pronounced him to be: and in delineating him, he has avoided the method of separate generalities, and rather sought for characteristic incidents, habits, actions, sayings; in a word, for a-

pects which exhibit the whole man, as he looked and lived among his fellows. The book accordingly, with all its deficiencies, gives more insight, we think, into the true character of Burns, than any prior biography: though, being written on the very popular and condensed scheme of an article for *Constable's Miscellany*, it has less depth than we could have wished and expected from a writer of such power; and contains rather more, and more multifarious quotations than belong of right to an original production. Indeed, Mr. Lockhart's own writing is generally so good, so clear, direct and nervous, that we seldom wish to see it making place for another man's. However, the spirit of the work is throughout candid, tolerant and anxiously conciliating; compliments and praises are liberally distributed, on all hands, to great and small; and, as Mr. Morris Birkbeck observes of the society in the backwoods of America, 'the courtesies of polite life are never lost sight of for a moment.' But there are better things than these in the volume; and we can safely testify, not only that it is easily and pleasantly read a first time, but may even be without difficulty read again.

5. Nevertheless, we are far from thinking that the problem of Burns's Biography has yet been adequately solved. We do not allude so much to deficiency of facts or documents,—though of these we are still every day receiving some fresh accession,—as to the limited and imperfect application of them to the great end of Biography. Our notions upon this subject may perhaps appear extravagant; but if an individual is really of consequence enough to have his life and character recorded for public remembrance, we have always been of opinion that the public ought to be made acquainted with all the inward springs and relations of his character. How did the world and man's life, from his particular position, represent them-

selves to his mind? How did coexisting circumstances modify him from without; how did he modify these from within? With what endeavours and what efficacy rule over them; with what resistance and what suffering sink under them? In one word, what and how produced was the effect of society on him; what and how produced was his effect on society? He who should answer these questions, in regard to any individual, would, as we believe, furnish a model of perfection in Biography. Few individuals, indeed, can deserve such a study; and many *lives* will be written, and, for the gratification of innocent curiosity, ought to be written, and read and forgotten, which are not in this sense *biographies*. But Burns, if we mistake not, is one of these few individuals; and such a study, at least with such a result, he has not yet obtained. Our own contributions to it, we are aware, can be but scanty and feeble; but we offer them with good-will, and trust they may meet with acceptance from those they are intended for.

6. Burns first came upon the world as a prodigy;¹ and was, in that character, entertained by it, in the usual fashion, with loud, vague, tumultuous wonder, speedily subsiding into censure and neglect; till his early and most mournful death again awakened an enthusiasm for him, which, especially as there was now nothing to be done, and much to be spoken, has prolonged itself even to our own time. It is true, the 'nine days' have long since elapsed; and the very continuance of this clamour proves that Burns was no vulgar wonder. Accordingly, even in sober judgments, where, as years passed by, he has come to rest more and more exclusively on his own intrinsic merits, and may now be well-nigh shorn of that casual radiance, he appears not only as a true British poet, but as one of the most con-

¹ Cf. Introduction, pp. 13, 16 and 17.

siderable British men of the eighteenth century. Let it not be objected that he did little. He did much, if we consider where and how. If the work performed was small, we must remember that he had his very materials to discover; for the metal he worked in lay hid under the desert moor, where no eye but his had guessed its existence; and we may almost say, that with his own hand he had to construct the tools for fashioning it.¹ For he found himself in deepest obscurity, without help, without instruction, without model; or with models only of the meanest sort. An educated man stands, as it were, in the midst of a boundless arsenal and magazine, filled with all the weapons and engines which man's skill has been able to devise from the earliest time; and he works, accordingly, with a strength borrowed from all past ages. How different is *his* state who stands on the outside of that storehouse, and feels that its gates must be stormed, or remain forever shut against him! His means are the commonest and rudest; the mere work done is no measure of his strength. A dwarf behind his steam-engine may remove mountains; but no dwarf will hew them down with a pickaxe; and he must be a Titan that hurls them abroad with his arms.

7. It is in this last shape that Burns presents himself. Born in an age the most prosaic² Britain had yet seen, and in a condition the most disadvantageous, where his mind, if it accomplished aught, must accomplish it under the pressure of continual bodily toil, nay of penury and desponding apprehension of the worst evils, and with no furtherance but such knowledge as dwells in a poor man's hut, and the rhymes of a Ferguson or Ramsay for his standard of beauty, he sinks not under all these impediments: through the fogs and darkness of that obscure re-

¹ Cf. Introduction, p. 11.

² Cf. Introduction, pp. 17 to 19.

gion, his lynx eye discerns the true relations of the world and human life; he grows into intellectual strength, and trains himself into intellectual expertness. Impelled by the expansive movement of his own irrepressible soul, he struggles forward into the general view; and with haughty modesty lays down before us, as the fruit of his labour, a gift, which Time has now pronounced imperishable. Add to all this, that his darksome drudging childhood and youth was by far the kindest era of his whole life; and that he died in his thirty-seventh year: and then ask, If it be strange that his poems are imperfect, and of small extent, or that his genius attained no mastery in its art? Alas, his Sun shone as through a tropical tornado; and the pale Shadow of Death eclipsed it at noon! Shrouded in such baleful vapours, the genius of Burns was never seen in clear azure splendour, enlightening the world: but some beams from it did, by fits, pierce through; and it tinted those clouds with rainbow and orient colours, into a glory and stern grandeur, which men silently gazed on with wonder and tears!

8. We are anxious not to exaggerate; for it is exposition rather than admiration that our readers require of us here; and yet to avoid some tendency to that side is no easy matter. We love Burns, and we pity him; and love and pity are prone to magnify. Criticism, it is sometimes thought, should be a cold business; we are not so sure of this; but, at all events, our concern with Burns is not exclusively that of critics. True and genial as his poetry must appear, it is not chiefly as a poet, but as a man, that he interests and affects us. He was often advised to write a tragedy: time and means were not lent him for this; but through life he enacted a tragedy, and one of the deepest. We question whether the world has since witnessed so utterly sad a scene; whether Napoleon himself, left to

brawl with Sir Hudson Lowe, and perish on his rock, 'amid the melancholy main,' presented to the reflecting mind such a 'spectacle of pity and fear' as did this intrinsically nobler, gentler and perhaps greater soul, wasting itself away in a hopeless struggle with base entanglements which coiled closer and closer round him, till only death opened him an outlet. Conquerors are a class of men with whom, for most part, the world could well dispense; nor can the hard intellect, the unsympathising loftiness and high but selfish enthusiasm of such persons inspire us in general with any affection; at best it may excite amazement; and their fall, like that of a pyramid, will be beheld with a certain sadness and awe. But a true Poet, a man in whose heart resides some effluence of Wisdom, some tone of the 'Eternal Melodies,' is the most precious gift that can be bestowed on a generation: we see in him a freer, purer development of whatever is noblest in ourselves; his life is a rich lesson to us; and we mourn his death as that of a benefactor who loved and taught us.

9. Such a gift had Nature, in her bounty, bestowed on us in Robert Burns; but with queenlike indifference she cast it from her hand, like a thing of no moment; and it was defaced and torn asunder, as an idle bauble, before we recognised it. To the ill-starred Burns was given the power of making man's life more venerable, but that of wisely guiding his own life was not given. Destiny,—for so in our ignorance we must speak,—his faults, the faults of others, proved too hard for him; and that spirit, which might have soared could it but have walked, soon sank to the dust, its glorious faculties trodden under foot in the blossom; and died, we may almost say, without ever having lived. And so kind and warm a soul; so full of inborn riches, of love to all living and lifeless things! How his heart flows out in sympathy over uni-

versal Nature; and in her bleakest provinces discerns a beauty and a meaning! The 'Daisy' falls not unheeded under his ploughshare; nor the ruined nest of that 'wee, cowering, timorous beastie,' cast forth, after all its provident pains, to 'thole¹ the sleety dribble and cranreuch² cauld.' The 'hoar visage' of Winter delights him; he dwells with a sad and oft-returning fondness in these scenes of solemn desolation; but the voice of the tempest becomes an anthem to his ears; he loves to walk in the sounding woods, for 'it raises his thoughts to *Him that walketh on the wings of the wind.*' A true Poet-soul, for it needs but to be struck, and the sound it yields will be music! But observe him chiefly as he mingles with his brother men. What warm, all-comprehending fellow-feeling; what trustful, boundless love; what generous exaggeration of the object loved! His rustic friend, his nut-brown maiden, are no longer mean and homely, but a hero and a queen, whom he prizes as the paragons of Earth. The rough scenes of Scottish life, not seen by him in any Arcadian illusion, but in the rude contradiction, in the smoke and soil of a too harsh reality, are still lovely to him: Poverty is indeed his companion, but Love also, and Courage; the simple feelings, the worth, the nobleness, that dwell under the straw roof, are dear and venerable to his heart³: and thus over the lowest provinces of man's existence he pours the glory of his own soul; and they rise, in shadow and sunshine, softened and brightened into a beauty which other eyes discern not in the highest. He has a just self-consciousness, which too often degenerates into pride; yet it is a noble pride, for defence, not for offence; no cold suspicious feeling, but a frank and social

¹ Endure.

² Hoarfrost. Read the two poems, pp. 34 and 26.

³ Read *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, p. 28.

one. The Peasant Poet bears himself, we might say, like a King in exile: he is cast among the low, and feels himself equal to the highest; yet he claims no rank, that none may be disputed to him. The forward he can repel, the supercilious he can subdue; pretensions of wealth or ancestry are of no avail with him; there is a fire in that dark eye, under which the 'insolence of condescension' cannot thrive. In his abasement, in his extreme need, he forgets not for a moment the majesty of Poetry and Manhood. And yet, far as he feels himself above common men, he wanders not apart from them, but mixes warmly in their interests; nay throws himself into their arms, and, as it were, entreats them to love him. It is moving to see how, in his darkest despondency, this proud being still seeks relief from friendship; unbosoms himself often to the unworthy; and, amid tears, strains to his glowing heart a heart that knows only the name of friendship. And yet he was 'quick to learn'¹; a man of keen vision, before whom common disguises afforded no concealment. His understanding saw through the hollowness even of accomplished deceivers; but there was a generous credulity in his heart. And so did our Peasant show himself among us; 'a soul like an Æolian harp, in whose strings the vulgar wind, as it passed through them, changed itself into articulate melody.' And this was he for whom the world found no fitter business than quarrelling with smugglers and vintners, computing excise-dues upon tallow, and gauging ale barrels! In such toils was that mighty Spirit sorrowfully wasted: and a hundred years may pass on before another such is given us to waste.

10. All that remains of Burns, the Writings he has left, seem to us, as we hinted above, no more than a poor

¹ Read *A Bard's Epitaph*, p. 36.

mutilated fraction of what was in him; brief, broken glimpses of a genius that could never show itself complete; that wanted all things for completeness: culture, leisure, true effort, nay even length of life. His poems are, with scarcely any exception, mere occasional effusions; • poured forth with little premeditation; expressing, by such means as offered, the passion, opinion, or humour of the hour. Never in one instance was it permitted him to grapple with any subject with the full collection of his strength, to fuse and mould it in the concentrated fire of his genius. To try by the strict rules of Art such imperfect fragments, would be at once unprofitable and unfair. Nevertheless, there is something in these poems, marred and defective as they are, which forbids the most fastidious student of poetry to pass them by. Some sort of enduring quality they must have: for after fifty years of the wildest vicissitudes in poetic taste, they still continue to be read; nay, are read more and more eagerly, more and more extensively; and this not only by literary virtuosos, and that class upon whom transitory causes operate most strongly, but by all classes, down to the most hard, unlettered and truly natural class, who read little, and especially no poetry, except because they find pleasure in it. The grounds of so singular and wide a popularity, which extends, in a literal sense, from the palace to the hut, and over all regions where the English tongue is spoken, are well worth inquiring into. After every just deduction, it seems to imply some rare excellence in these works. What is that excellence?

11. To answer this question will not lead us far. The excellence of Burns is, indeed, among the rarest, whether in poetry or prose; but, at the same time, it is plain and easily recognised: his *Sincerity*, his indisputable air of Truth. Here are no fabulous woes or joys; no hollow

fantastic sentimentalities; no wiredrawn refinings, either in thought or feeling: the passion that is traced before us has glowed in a living heart; the opinion he utters has risen in his own understanding, and been a light to his own steps. He does not write from hearsay, but from sight and experience; it is the scenes that he has lived and laboured amidst, that he describes: those scenes, rude and humble as they are, have kindled beautiful emotions in his soul, noble thoughts, and definite resolves; and he speaks forth what is in him, not from any outward call of vanity or interest, but because his heart is too full to be silent. He speaks it with such melody and modulation as he can; 'in homely rustic jingle;' but it is his own, and genuine. This is the grand secret for finding readers and retaining them: let him who would move and convince others, be first moved and convinced himself. Horace's rule, *Si vis me flere*, is applicable in a wider sense than the literal one. To every poet, to every writer, we might say: Be true, if you would be believed. Let a man but speak forth with genuine earnestness the thought, the emotion, the actual condition of his own heart; and other men, so strangely are we all knit together by the tie of sympathy, must and will give heed to him. In culture, in extent of view, we may stand above the speaker, or below him; but in either case, his words, if they are earnest and sincere, will find some response within us; for in spite of all casual varieties in outward rank or inward, as face answers to face, so does the heart of man to man.

12. This may appear a very simple principle, and one which Burns had little merit in discovering. True, the discovery is easy enough: but the practical appliance is not easy; is indeed the fundamental difficulty which all poets have to strive with, and which scarcely one in the hundred ever fairly surmounts. A head too dull to dis-

criminate the true from the false; a heart too dull to love the one at all risks, and to hate the other in spite of all temptations, are alike fatal to a writer. With either, or as more commonly happens, with both of these deficiencies combine a love of distinction, a wish to be original, which is seldom wanting, and we have Affectation, the bane of literature, as Cant, its elder brother, is of morals. How often does the one and the other front us, in poetry, as in life! Great poets themselves are not always free of this vice; nay, it is precisely on a certain sort and degree of greatness that it is most commonly ingrafted. A strong effort after excellence will sometimes solace itself with a mere shadow of success; he who has much to unfold, will sometimes unfold it imperfectly. Byron, for instance, was no common man: yet if we examine his poetry with this view, we shall find it far enough from faultless. Generally speaking, we should say that it is not true. He refreshes us, not with the divine fountain, but too often with vulgar strong waters, stimulating indeed to the taste, but soon ending in dislike, or even nausea. Are his Harolds and Giaours, we would ask, real men; we mean, poetically consistent and conceivable men? Do not these characters, does not the character of their author, which more or less shines through them all, rather appear a thing put on for the occasion; no natural or possible mode of being, but something intended to look much grander than nature? Surely, all these stormful agonies, this volcanic heroism, superhuman contempt and moody desperation, with so much scowling, and teeth-gnashing, and other sulphurous humour, is more like the brawling of a player in some paltry tragedy, which is to last three hours, than the bearing of a man in the business of life, which is to last threescore and ten years. To our minds there is a taint of this sort, something which we should call theatrical, false, affected,

in every one of these otherwise so powerful pieces. Perhaps *Don Juan*, especially the latter parts of it, is the only thing approaching to a *sincere* work, he ever wrote; the only work where he showed himself, in any measure, as he was; and seemed so intent on his subject as, for moments, to forget himself. Yet Byron hated this vice; we believe, heartily detested it: nay he had declared formal war against it in words. So difficult is it even for the strongest to make this primary attainment, which might seem the simplest of all: to *read its own consciousness without mistakes*, without errors involuntary or wilful! We recollect no poet of Burns's susceptibility who comes before us from the first, and abides with us to the last, with such a total want of affectation. He is an honest man, and an honest writer. In his successes and his failures, in his greatness and his littleness, he is ever clear, simple, true, and glitters with no lustre but his own. We reckon this to be a great virtue; to be, in fact, the root of most other virtues, literary as well as moral.

13. Here, however, let us say, it is to the Poetry of Burns that we now allude; to those writings which he had time to meditate, and where no special reason existed to warp his critical feeling, or obstruct his endeavour to fulfil it. Certain of his Letters, and other fractions of prose composition, by no means deserve this praise. Here, doubtless, there is not the same natural truth of style; but, on the contrary, something not only stiff, but strained and twisted; a certain high-flown inflated tone; the stilted emphasis of which contrasts ill with the firmness and rugged simplicity of even his poorest verses. Thus no man, it would appear, is altogether unaffected. Does not Shakespeare himself sometimes premeditate the sheerest bombast! But even with regard to these Letters of Burns, it is but fair to state that he had two excuses. The first

was his comparative deficiency in language. Burns, though for most part he writes with singular force and even gracefulness, is not master of English prose, as he is of Scottish verse; not master of it, we mean, in proportion to the depth and vehemence of his matter. These Letters strike us as the effort of a man to express something which he has no organ fit for expressing. But a second and weightier excuse is to be found in the peculiarity of Burns's social rank. His correspondents are often men whose relation to him he has never accurately ascertained; whom therefore he is either forearming himself against, or else unconsciously flattering, by adopting the style he thinks will please them. At all events, we should remember that these faults, even in his Letters, are not the rule, but the exception. Whenever he writes, as one would ever wish to do, to trusted friends and on real interests, his style becomes simple, vigorous, expressive, sometimes even beautiful. His letters to Mrs. Dunlop are uniformly excellent.

14. But we return to his Poetry. In addition to its Sincerity, it has another peculiar merit, which indeed is but a mode, or perhaps a means, of the foregoing: this displays itself in his choice of subjects; or rather in his indifference as to subjects, and the power he has of making all subjects interesting. The ordinary poet, like the ordinary man, is forever seeking in external circumstances the help which can be found only in himself. In what is familiar and near at hand, he discerns no form or comeliness: home is not poetical, but prosaic; it is in some past, distant, conventional heroic world that poetry resides. Were he there and not here, were he thus and not so, it would be well with him. Hence our innumerable host of rose-coloured Novels and iron-mailed Epics, with their locality not on the Earth, but somewhere nearer to the Moon. Hence our Virgins of the Sun, and our Knights of the

Cross, malicious Saracens in turbans, and copper-coloured Chiefs in wampum, and so many other truculent figures from the heroic times or the heroic climates, who on all hands swarm in our poetry. Peace be with them! But yet, as a great moralist proposed preaching to the men of this century, so would we fain preach to the poets, 'a sermon on the duty of staying at home.' Let them be sure that heroic ages and heroic climates can do little for them. That form of life has attraction for us, less because it is better or nobler than our own, than simply because it is different; and even this attraction must be of the most transient sort. For will not our own age, one day, be an ancient one; and have as quaint a costume as the rest; not contrasted with the rest, therefore, but ranked along with them in respect of quaintness? Does Homer interest us now, because he wrote of what passed beyond his native Greece, and two centuries before he was born; or because he wrote what passed in God's world, and in the heart of man, which is the same after thirty centuries? Let our poets look to this: is their feeling really finer, truer, and their vision deeper than that of other men,—they have nothing to fear, even from the humblest subject; is it not so,—they have nothing to hope, but an ephemeral favour, even from the highest.

15. The poet, we imagine, can never have far to seek for a subject: the elements of his art are in him, and around him on every hand; for him the Ideal world is not remote from the Actual, but under it and within it: nay, he is a poet, precisely because he can discern it there. Wherever there is a sky above him, and a world around him, the poet is in his place; for here too is man's existence, with its infinite longings and small acquirings; its ever-thwarted, ever-renewed endeavors; its unspeakable aspirations, its fears and hopes that wander through Eternity;

and all the mystery of brightness and of gloom that it was ever made of, in any age or climate, since man first began to live. Is there not the fifth act of a Tragedy in every death-bed, though it were a peasant's, and a bed of heath? And are wooings and weddings obsolete, that there can be Comedy no longer! Or are men suddenly grown wise, that Laughter must no longer shake his sides, but be cheated of his Farce? Man's life and nature is, as it was, and as it will ever be. But the poet must have an eye to read these things, and a heart to understand them; or they come and pass away before him in vain. He is a *vates*, a seer; a gift of vision has been given him. Has life no meanings for him, which another cannot equally decipher; then he is no poet, and Delphi itself will not make him one.

16. In this respect, Burns, though not perhaps absolutely a great poet, better manifests his capability, better proves the truth of his genius, than if he had by his own strength kept the whole Minerva Press going to the end of his literary course. He shows himself at least a poet of Nature's own making; and Nature, after all, is still the grand agent in making poets. We often hear of this and the other external condition being requisite for the existence of a poet. Sometimes it is a certain sort of training; he must have studied certain things, studied for instance 'the elder dramatists,' and so learned a poetic language; as if poetry lay in the tongue, not in the heart. At other times we are told he must be bred in a certain rank, and must be on a confidential footing with the higher classes; because, above all things, he must see the world. As to seeing the world, we apprehend this will cause him little difficulty, if he have but eyesight to see it with. Without eyesight, indeed, the task might be hard. The blind or the purblind man 'travels from Dan to Beersheba, and finds it all barren.' But happily every poet is

born in the world; and sees it, with or against his will, every day and every hour he lives. The mysterious workmanship of man's heart, the true light and the inscrutable darkness of man's destiny, reveal themselves not only in capital cities and crowded saloons, but in every hut and hamlet where men have their abode. Nay, do not the elements of all human virtues and all human vices; the passions at once of a Borgia and of a Luther, lie written, in stronger or fainter lines, in the consciousness of every individual bosom, that has practised honest self-examination? Truly, this same world may be seen in Mossgiel and Tarbolton,¹ if we look well, as clearly as it ever came to light in Crockford's, or the Tuileries itself.

17. But sometimes still harder requisitions are laid on the poor aspirant to poetry; for it is hinted that he should have *been born* two centuries ago; inasmuch as poetry, about that date, vanished from the earth, and became no longer attainable by men! Such cobweb speculations have, now and then, overhung the field of literature; but they obstruct not the growth of any plant there: the Shakspeare or the Burns, unconsciously and merely as he walks onward, silently brushes them away. Is not every genius an impossibility till he appear? Why do we call him new and original, if *we* saw where his marble was lying, and what fabric he could rear from it? It is not the material but the workman that is wanting. It is not the dark *place* that hinders, but the dim *eye*. A Scottish peasant's life was the meanest and rudest of all lives, till Burns became a poet in it, and a poet of it; found it a *man's* life, and therefore significant to men. A thousand battle-fields remain unsung; but the *Wounded Hare*² has not perished

¹ Cf. Introduction, pp. 11 to 13, and map.

² Read the poem, p. 40.

without its memorial; a balm of mercy yet breathes on us from its dumb agonies, because a poet was there. Our *Halloween* had passed and repassed, in rude awe and laughter, since the era of the Druids; but no Theocritus, till Burns, discerned in it the materials of a Scottish Idyl: neither was the *Holy Fair* any *Council of Trent* or *Roman Jubilee*; but nevertheless, *Superstition* and *Hypocrisy* and *Fun* having been propitious to him, in this man's hand it became a poem, instinct with satire and genuine comic life. Let but the true poet be given us, we repeat it, place him where and how you will, and true poetry will not be wanting.

18. Independently of the essential gift of poetic feeling, as we have now attempted to describe it, a certain rugged sterling worth pervades whatever Burns has written; a virtue, as of green fields and mountain breezes, dwells in his poetry; it is redolent of natural life and hardy natural men. There is a decisive strength in him, and yet a sweet native gracefulness: he is tender, he is vehement, yet without constraint or too visible effort; he melts the heart, or inflames it, with a power which seems habitual and familiar to him. We see that in this man there was the gentleness, the trembling pity of a woman, with the deep earnestness, the force and passionate ardour of a hero. Tears lie in him, and consuming fire; as lightning lurks in the drops of the summer cloud. He has a resonance in his bosom for every note of human feeling; the high and the low, the sad, the ludicrous, the joyful, are welcome in their turns to his 'lightly-moved and all-conceiving spirit.' And observe with what a fierce prompt force he grasps his subject, be it what it may! How he fixes, as it were, the full image of the matter in his eye; full and clear in every lineament; and catches the real type and essence of it, amid a thousand accidents and su-

perfidious circumstances, no one of which misleads him! ¹ Is it of reason; some truth to be discovered? No sophistry, no vain surface-logic detains him; quick, resolute, unerring, he pierces through into the marrow of the question; and speaks his verdict with an emphasis that cannot be forgotten. Is it of description; some visual object to be represented? No poet of any age or nation is more graphic than Burns: the characteristic features disclose themselves to him at a glance; three lines from his hand, and we have a likeness. And, in that rough dialect, in that rude, often awkward metre, so clear and definite a likeness! It seems a draughtsman working with a burnt stick; and yet the burin of a Retzsch is not more expressive or exact.

19. Of this last excellence, the plainest and most comprehensive of all, being indeed the root and foundation of *every* sort of talent, poetical or intellectual, we could produce innumerable instances from the writings of Burns. Take these glimpses of a snow-storm from his *Winter Night* ² (the italics are ours):

When biting Boreas, fell and doure,³
Sharp shivers thro' the leafless bow'r,
 And Phœbus *gies a short-liv'd glowr*
*Far south the lift,*⁴
Dim-dark'ning thro' the flaky show'r
Or whirling drift:

'Ae night the storm the steeples rock'd,
 Poor labour sweet in sleep was lock'd,
 While burns ⁵ *wi' snawy wreaths* ⁶ *upchok'd*
Wild-eddying swirl,
 Or thro' the mining outlet bock'd,⁷
 Down headlong hurl.

¹ Cf. Introduction, p. 6.

² Read the poem, p. 23.

³ Keen and stubborn.

⁴ Sky.

⁵ Small streams.

⁶ Drifted snow heaps.

⁷ Sent gushing.

Are there not 'descriptive touches' here? The describer *saw* this thing; the essential feature and true likeness of every circumstance in it; *saw*, and not with the eye only. 'Poor labour locked in sweet sleep'; the dead stillness of man, unconscious, vanquished, yet not unprotected, while such strife of the material elements rages, and seems to reign supreme in loneliness: this is of the heart as well as of the eye!—Look also at his image of a thaw, and prophesied fall of the *Auld Brig*:

When heavy, dark, continued, a'-day rains
 Wi' deepening deluges o'erflow the plains;
 When from the hills where springs the brawling Coil,
 Or stately Lugar's *mossy* fountains *boil*,
 Or where the Greenock winds his *moorland* course,
 Or haunted Garpal¹ draws his feeble source,
 Arous'd by blust'ring winds and *spotting* thowes,²
*In mony a torrent down his snaw-broo rowes;*³
*While crashing ice, borne on the roaring speat,*⁴
*Sweeps dams and mills and brigs*⁵ *a' to the gate;*
 And from Glenbuck down to the Rottenkey,
 Auld Ayr is just one lengthen'd *tumbling* sea;
 Then down ye'll hurl, Deil nor ye never rise!
 And *dash the gumlie jaups*⁶ *up to the pouring skies.*

The last line is in itself a Poussin-picture of that Deluge! The welkin has, as it were, bent down with its weight; the 'gumlie jaups' and the 'pouring skies' are mingled together; it is a world of rain and ruin. In respect of mere clearness and minute fidelity, the *Farmer's* commendation of his *Auld Mare*,⁷ in plough or in cart, may vie with Homer's Smithy of the Cyclops, or yoking of

¹ *Fabulosus* Hydaspes (Carlyle's note).

² Thaws.

³ Melted snow (literally "snow-broth") rolls.

⁴ Flood.

⁵ Bridges.

⁶ Muddy waves.

⁷ Cf. Reading List, p. 52.

Priam's Chariot. Nor have we forgotten stout *Burn-the-wind*¹ and his brawny customers, inspired by *Scotch Drink*: but it is needless to multiply examples. One other trait of a much finer sort we select from multitudes of such among his *Songs*. It gives, in a single line, to the saddest feeling the saddest environment and local habitation:

*The pale Moon is setting beyond the white wave,
And Time is setting wi' me, O;
Farewell, false friends! false lover, farewell!
I'll nae mair trouble them nor thee, O.*

20. This clearness of sight we have called the foundation of all talent; for in fact, unless we *see* our object, how shall we know how to place or prize it, in our understanding, our imagination, our affections? Yet it is not in itself, perhaps, a very high excellence; but capable of being united indifferently with the strongest, or with ordinary powers. Homer surpasses all men in this quality: but strangely enough, at no great distance below him are Richardson and Defoe. It belongs, in truth, to what is called a lively mind; and gives no sure indication of the higher endowments that may exist along with it. In all the three cases we have mentioned, it is combined with great garrulity; their descriptions are detailed, ample and lovingly exact; Homer's fire bursts through, from time to time, as if by accident; but Defoe and Richardson have no fire. Burns, again, is not more distinguished by the clearness than by the impetuous force of his conceptions. Of the strength, the piercing emphasis with which he thought, his emphasis of expression may give a humble but the readiest proof. Who ever uttered sharper sayings than his; words more memorable, now by their burning

¹ A blacksmith.

vehemence, now by their cool vigour and laconic pith? A single phrase depicts a whole subject, a whole scene. We hear of 'a gentleman that derived his patent of nobility direct from Almighty God.' Our Scottish forefathers in the battle-field struggled forward '*red-wat-shod*':¹ in this one word, a full vision of horror and carnage, perhaps too frightfully accurate for Art!

21. In fact, one of the leading features in the mind of Burns is this vigour of his strictly intellectual perceptions. A resolute force is ever visible in his judgments, and in his feelings and volitions. Professor Stewart says of him, with some surprise: 'All the faculties of Burns's mind were, as far as I could judge, equally vigorous; and his predilection for poetry was rather the result of his own enthusiastic and impassioned temper, than of a genius exclusively adapted to that species of composition. From his conversation I should have pronounced him to be fitted to excel in whatever walk of ambition he had chosen to exert his abilities.' But this, if we mistake not, is at all times the very essence of a truly poetical endowment. Poetry, except in such cases as that of Keats, where the whole consists in a weak-eyed maudlin sensibility, and a certain vague random tunefulness of nature, is no separate faculty, no organ which can be superadded to the rest, or disjoined from them; but rather the result of their general harmony and completion. The feelings, the gifts that exist in the Poet are those that exist, with more or less development, in every human soul: the imagination, which shudders at the Hell of Dante, is the same faculty, weaker in degree, which called that picture into being. How does the Poet speak to men, with power, but by being still more a man than they? Shakspeare, it has been well

¹ With feet wet with blood.

observed, in the planning and completing of his tragedies, has shown an Understanding, were it nothing more, which might have governed states, or indited a *Novum Organum*. What Burns's force of understanding may have been, we have less means of judging: it had to dwell among the humblest objects; never saw Philosophy; never rose, except by natural effort and for short intervals, into the region of great ideas. Nevertheless, sufficient indication, if no proof sufficient, remains for us in his works: we discern the brawny movements of a gigantic though untutored strength; and can understand how, in conversation, his quick sure insight into men and things may, as much as aught else about him, have amazed the best thinkers of his time and country.

22. But, unless we mistake, the intellectual gift of Burns is fine as well as strong. The more delicate relations of things could not well have escaped his eye, for they were intimately present to his heart. The logic of the senate and the forum is indispensable, but not all-sufficient; nay perhaps the highest Truth is that which will the most certainly elude it. For this logic works by words, and 'the highest,' it has been said, 'cannot be expressed in words.' We are not without tokens of an openness for this higher truth also, of a keen though uncultivated sense for it, having existed in Burns. Mr. Stewart, it will be remembered, 'wonders,' in the passage above quoted, that Burns had formed some distinct conception of the 'doctrine of association.' We rather think that far subtler things than the doctrine of association had from of old been familiar to him. Here, for instance:

23. 'We know nothing,' thus writes he, 'or next to nothing, of the structure of our souls, so we cannot account for those seeming caprices in them, that one should be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which, on

minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the harebell, the foxglove, the wild brier rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of gray plover in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the Æolian harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident; or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities: a God that made all things, man's immaterial and immortal nature, and a world of weal or wo beyond death and the grave.'¹

24. Force and fineness of understanding are often spoken of as something different from general force and fineness of nature, as something partly independent of them. The necessities of language so require it; but in truth these qualities are not distinct and independent: except in special cases, and from special causes, they ever go together. A man of strong understanding is generally a man of strong character; neither is delicacy in the one kind often divided from delicacy in the other. No one, at all events, is ignorant that in the Poetry of Burns keenness of insight keeps pace with keenness of feeling; that his *light* is not more pervading than his *warmth*. He is a man of the most impassioned temper; with passions not strong only, but noble, and of the sort in which great virtues and great poems take their rise. It is reverence, it is love towards all Nature that inspires him, that opens his eyes

¹ Letter to Mrs. Dunlop.

to its beauty, and makes heart and voice eloquent in its praise. There is a true old saying, that 'Love furthers knowledge:' but, above all, it is the living essence of that knowledge which makes poets; the first principle of its existence, increase, activity. Of Burns's fervid affection, his generous all-embracing Love, we have spoken already, as of the grand distinction of his nature, seen equally in word and deed, in his Life and in his Writings. It were easy to multiply examples. Not man only, but all that environs man in the material and moral universe, is lovely in his sight: 'the hoary hawthorn,' the 'troop of gray plover,' the 'solitary curlew,' all are dear to him; all live in this Earth along with him, and to all he is knit as in mysterious brotherhood. How touching is it, for instance, that, amidst the gloom of personal misery, brooding over the wintry desolation without him and within him, he thinks of the 'ourie¹ cattle' and 'silly sheep,' and their sufferings in the pitiless storm!

I thought me on the ourie¹ cattle,
Or silly² sheep, wha bide this brattle³
O' wintry war,
Or thro' the drift, deep-lairing,⁴ sprattle,⁵
Beneath a scaur.⁶

Ilk⁷ happing⁸ bird, wee helpless thing;
That in the merry months o' spring
Delighted me to hear thee sing,
What comes o' thee?
Where wilt thou cow'r thy chittering⁹ wing,
And close thy ee?

The tenant of the mean hut, with its 'ragged roof and chinky wall,' has a heart to pity even these! This is worth

¹ Shivering.

² Helpless.

³ Pelting.

⁴ Sinking deep.

⁵ Scramble, struggle.

⁶ Cliff.

⁷ Each.

⁸ Hopping.

⁹ Trembling with cold.

several homilies on Mercy; for it is the voice of Mercy herself. Burns, indeed, lives in sympathy; his soul rushes forth into all realms of being; nothing that has existence can be indifferent to him. The very Devil he cannot hate with right orthodoxy:

But fare ye weel, auld Nickie-ben¹;
 O, wad ye tak a thought and men'²!
 Ye aiblins³ might,—I dinna ken,—
 Still hae a stake;⁴
 I'm wae⁵ to think upo' yon den,
 Even for your sake!

"*He* is the father of curses and lies," said Dr. Slop; "and is cursed and damned already."—"I am sorry for it," quoth my uncle Toby!—a Poet without Love were a physical and metaphysical impossibility.

25. But has it not been said, in contradiction to this principle, that 'Indignation makes verses'? It has been so said, and is true enough: but the contradiction is apparent, not real. The Indignation which makes verses is, properly speaking, an inverted Love; the love of some right, some worth, some goodness, belonging to ourselves or others, which has been injured, and which this tempestuous feeling issues forth to defend and avenge. No selfish fury of heart, existing there as a primary feeling, and without its opposite, ever produced much Poetry: otherwise, we suppose, the Tiger were the most musical of all our choristers. Johnson said, he loved a good hater; by which he must have meant, not so much one that hated violently, as one that hated wisely; hated baseness from love of nobleness. However, in spite of Johnson's paradox, tolerable enough for once in speech, but which need

¹ Nick, old fellow.

² Amend.

³ Perhaps.

⁴ Still have a chance.

⁵ Sorry.

not have been so often adopted in print since then, we rather believe that good men deal sparingly in hatred, either wise or unwise: nay that a 'good' hater is still a desideratum in this world. The Devil, at least, who passes for the chief and best of that class, is said to be nowise an amiable character.

26. Of the verses which Indignation makes, Burns has also given us specimens: and among the best that were ever given. Who will forget his '*Dweller in yon Dungeon dark*'; a piece that might have been chanted by the Furies of Æschylus? The secrets of the infernal Pit are laid bare; a boundless baleful 'darkness visible'; and streaks of hell-fire quivering madly in its black haggard bosom!

Dweller in yon Dungeon dark,
Hangman of Creation, mark!
Who in widow's weeds appears,
Laden with unhonoured years,
Noosing¹ with care a bursting purse,
Baited with many a deadly curse!

27. Why should we speak of *Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled*²; since all know of it, from the king to the meanest of his subjects? This dithyrambic was composed on horseback; in riding in the middle of tempests, over the wildest Galloway moor, in company with a Mr. Syme, who, observing the poet's looks, forbore to speak,—judiciously enough, for a man composing *Bruce's Address* might be unsafe to trifle with. Doubtless this stern hymn was singing itself, as he formed it, through the soul of Burns: but to the external ear, it should be sung with the throat of the whirlwind. So long as there is warm blood in the heart of

¹ Tying loosely.

² Read the poem, p. 50, and compare its note with the statement here given.

Scotchman or man, it will move in fierce thrills under this war-ode; the best, we believe, that was ever written by any pen.

28. Another wild stormful Song, that dwells in our ear and mind with a strange tenacity, is *Macpherson's Farewell*.¹ Perhaps there is something in the tradition itself that coöperates. For was not this grim Celt, this shaggy Northland Cacus, that 'lived a life of sturt² and strife, and died by treacherie,'—was not he too one of the Nimrods and Napoleons of the earth, in the arena of his own remote misty glens, for want of a clearer and wider one? Nay, was there not a touch of grace given him? A fibre of love and softness, of poetry itself, must have lived in his savage heart: for he composed that air the night before his execution; on the wings of that poor melody his better soul would soar away above oblivion, pain and all the ignominy and despair, which, like an avalanche, was hurling him to the abyss! Here also, as at Thebes, and in Pelops' line, was material Fate matched against man's Free-will; matched in bitterest though obscure duel; and the ethereal soul sank not, even in its blindness, without a cry which has survived it. But who, except Burns, could have given words to such a soul; words that we never listen to without a strange half-barbarous, half-poetic fellow-feeling?

*Sae rantingly,³ sae wantonly,
Sae dauntingly gaed he;
He play'd a spring, and danced it round,
Below the gallows-tree.*

29. Under a lighter disguise, the same principle of Love, which we have recognised as the great characteristic of Burns, and of all true poets, occasionally manifests itself in the shape of Humour. Everywhere, indeed, in his

¹ Read the poem, p. 38.

² Trouble.

³ Gleeefully.

sunny moods, a full buoyant flood of mirth rolls through the mind of Burns; he rises to the high, and stoops to the low, and is brother and playmate to all Nature. We speak not of his bold and often irresistible faculty of caricature; for this is Drollery rather than Humour: but a much tenderer sportfulness dwells in him; and comes forth here and there, in evanescent and beautiful touches; as in his *Address to the Mouse*,¹ or the *Farmer's Mare*, or in his *Elegy on poor Mailie*, which last may be reckoned his happiest effort of this kind. In these pieces there are traits of a Humour as fine as that of Sterne; yet altogether different, original, peculiar,—the Humour of Burns.

30. Of the tenderness, the playful pathos, and many other kindred qualities of Burns's Poetry, much more might be said; but now, with these poor outlines of a sketch, we must prepare to quit this part of our subject. To speak of his individual Writings, adequately and with any detail, would lead us far beyond our limits. As already hinted, we can look on but few of these pieces as, in strict critical language, deserving the name of Poems: they are rhymed eloquence, rhymed pathos, rhymed sense; yet seldom essentially melodious, aerial, poetical. *Tam o' Shanter* itself, which enjoys so high a favour, does not appear to us at all decisively to come under this last category. It is not so much a poem, as a piece of sparkling rhetoric; the heart and body of the story still lies hard and dead. He has not gone back, much less carried us back, into that dark, earnest, wondering age, when the tradition was believed, and when it took its rise; he does not attempt, by any new-modeling of his supernatural ware, to strike anew that deep mysterious chord of human nature,

¹ Read this, and the *Elegy*, pp. 26 and 21.

which once responded to such things; and which lives in us too, and will forever live, though silent now, or vibrating with far other notes, and to far different issues. Our German readers will understand us, when we say, that he is not the Tieck but the Musäus of this tale. Externally it is all green and living; yet look closer, it is no firm growth, but only ivy on a rock. The piece does not properly cohere: the strange chasm which yawns in our incredulous imaginations between the Ayr public-house and the gate of Tophet, is nowhere bridged over, nay the idea of such a bridge is laughed at; and thus the Tragedy of the adventure becomes a mere drunken phantasmagoria, or many-coloured spectrum painted on ale-vapours, and the Farce alone has any reality. We do not say that Burns should have made much more of this tradition; we rather think that, for strictly poetical purposes, not much *was* to be made of it. Neither are we blind to the deep, varied, genial power displayed in what he has actually accomplished; but we find far more ‘Shakspearean’ qualities, as these of *Tam o’ Shanter* have been fondly named, in many of his other pieces; nay we incline to believe that this latter might have been written, all but quite as well, by a man who, in place of genius, had only possessed talent.

31. Perhaps we may venture to say, that the most strictly poetical of all his ‘poems’ is one which does not appear in Currie’s Edition; but has been often printed before and since, under the humble title of *The Jolly Beggars*. The subject truly is among the lowest in Nature; but it only the more shows our Poet’s gift in raising it into the domain of Art. To our minds, this piece seems thoroughly compacted; melted together, refined; and poured forth in one flood of true *liquid* harmony. It is light, airy, soft of movement; yet sharp and precise in its details; every face is a

portrait: that *raucle carlin*,¹ that *wee Apollo*,² that *Son of Mars*,³ are Scottish, yet ideal; the scene is at once a dream, and the very Ragcastle of 'Poosie-Nansie.' Farther, it seems in a considerable degree complete, a real self-supporting Whole, which is the highest merit in a poem. The blanket of the Night is drawn asunder for a moment; in full, ruddy, flaming light, these rough tatterdemalions are seen in their boisterous revel; for the strong pulse of Life vindicates its right to gladness even here; and when the curtain closes, we prolong the action, without effort; the next day as the last, our *Caird*⁴ and our *Ballad-monger* are singing and soldiering; their 'brats'⁵ and callets⁶ are hawking, begging, cheating; and some other night, in new combinations, they will wring from Fate another hour of wassail and good cheer. Apart from the universal sympathy with man which this again bespeaks in Burns, a genuine inspiration and no inconsiderable technical talent are manifested here. There is the fidelity, humour, warm life and accurate painting and grouping of some Teniers, for whom hostlers and carousing peasants are not without significance. It would be strange, doubtless, to call this the best of Burns's writings: we mean to say only, that it seems to us the most perfect of its kind, as a piece of poetical composition, strictly so called. In the *Beggars' Opera*, in the *Beggars' Bush*, as other critics have already remarked, there is nothing which, in real poetic vigour, equals this *Cantata*; nothing, as we think, which comes within many degrees of it.

32. But by far the most finished, complete and truly inspired pieces of Burns are, without dispute, to be found among his *Songs*. It is here that, although through a small aperture, his light shines with least obstruction; in

¹ Sturdy crone.

² "Pigmy scraper wi' his fiddle."

³ Old soldier.

⁴ Tinker.

⁵ Children.

⁶ Women.

its highest beauty and pure sunny clearness. The reason may be, that Song is a brief simple species of composition; and requires nothing so much for its perfection as genuine poetic feeling, genuine music of heart. Yet the Song has its rules equally with the Tragedy; rules which in most cases are poorly fulfilled, in many cases are not so much as felt. We might write a long essay on the Songs of Burns; which we reckon by far the best that Britain has yet produced: for indeed, since the era of Queen Elizabeth, we know not that, by any other hand, aught truly worth attention has been accomplished in this department. True, we have songs enough 'by persons of quality'; we have tawdry, hollow, wine-bred madrigals; many a rhymed speech 'in the flowing and watery vein of Ossorius the Portugal Bishop,' rich in sonorous words, and, for moral, dashed perhaps with some tint of a sentimental sensuality; all which many persons cease not from endeavouring to sing; though for most part, we fear, the music is but from the throat outwards, or at best from some region far enough short of the *Soul*; not in which, but in a certain inane Limbo of the Fancy, or even in some vaporous debatable-land on the outskirts of the Nervous System, most of such madrigals and rhymed speeches seem to have originated.

33. With the Songs of Burns we must not name these things. Independently of the clear, manly, heartfelt sentiment that ever pervades *his* poetry, his Songs are honest in another point of view: in form, as well as in spirit. They do not *affect* to be set to music, but they actually and in themselves are music; they have received their life, and fashioned themselves together, in the medium of Harmony, as Venus rose from the bosom of the sea. The story, the feeling, is not detailed, but suggested; not *said*, or spouted, in rhetorical completeness and coherence; but *sung*, in fitful gushes, in glowing hints, in fantastic breaks,

in *wurblings* not of the voice only, but of the whole mind. We consider this to be the essence of a song; and that no songs since the little careless catches, and as it were drops of song, which Shakspeare has here and there sprinkled over his Plays, fulfil this condition in nearly the same degree as most of Burns's do. Such grace and truth of external movement, too, presupposes in general a corresponding force and truth of sentiment and inward meaning. The Songs of Burns are not more perfect in the former quality than in the latter. With what tenderness he sings, yet with what vehemence and entireness! There is a piercing wail in his sorrow, the purest rapture in his joy; he burns with the sternest ire, or laughs with the loudest or sliest mirth; and yet he is sweet and soft, 'sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet, and soft as their parting tear.' If we farther take into account the immense variety of his subjects; how, from the loud flowing revel in *Willie brew'd a Peck o' Maut*,¹ to the still, rapt enthusiasm of sadness for *Mary in Heaven*;² from the glad kind greeting of *Auld Langsyne*, or the comic archness of *Duncan Gray*, to the fire-eyed fury of *Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled*, he has found a tone and words for every mood of man's heart,—it will seem a small praise if we rank him as the first of all our Song-writers; for we know not where to find one worthy of being second to him.

34. It is on his Songs, as we believe, that Burns's chief influence as an author will ultimately be found to depend: nor, if our Fletcher's aphorism is true, shall we account this a small influence. 'Let me make the songs of a people,' said he, 'and you shall make its laws.' Surely, if ever any Poet might have equalled himself with Legislators on this ground, it was Burns. His Songs are already part

¹ Malt.

² Read the poem, p. 39.

of the mother-tongue, not of Scotland only but of Britain, and of the millions that in all ends of the earth speak a British language. In hut and hall, as the heart unfolds itself in many-coloured joy and woe of existence, the *name*, the *voice* of that joy and that woe, is the name and voice which Burns has given them. Strictly speaking, perhaps no British man has so deeply affected the thoughts and feelings of so many men, as this solitary and altogether private individual, with means apparently the humblest.

35. In another point of view, moreover, we incline to think that Burns's influence may have been considerable: we mean, as exerted specially on the Literature of his country, at least on the Literature of Scotland. Among the great changes which British, particularly Scottish literature, has undergone since that period, one of the greatest will be found to consist in its remarkable increase of nationality. Even the English writers, most popular in Burns's time, were little distinguished for their literary patriotism, in this its best sense. A certain attenuated cosmopolitanism had, in good measure, taken place of the old insular home-feeling; literature was, as it were, without any local environment; was not nourished by the affections which spring from a native soil. Our Grays and Glovers seemed to write almost as if *in vacuo*; the thing written bears no mark of place; it is not written so much for Englishmen, as for men; or rather, which is the inevitable result of this, for certain Generalisations which philosophy termed men. Goldsmith is an exception: not so Johnson; the scene of his *Rambler* is little more English than that of his *Rasselas*.

36. But if such was, in some degree, the case with England, it was, in the highest degree, the case with Scotland. In fact, our Scottish literature had, at that period, a very singular aspect; unexampled, so far as we know, except

perhaps at Geneva, where the same state of matters appears still to continue. For a long period after Scotland became British, we had no literature: at the date when Addison and Steele were writing their *Spectators*, our good John Boston was writing, with the noblest intent, but alike in defiance of grammar and philosophy, his *Fourfold State of Man*. Then came the schisms in our National Church,¹ and the fiercer schisms in our Body Politic: Theologic ink, and Jacobite blood, with gall enough in both cases, seemed to have blotted out the intellect of the country: however, it was only obscured, not obliterated. Lord Kames made nearly the first attempt at writing English; and ere long, Hume, Robertson, Smith, and a whole host of followers, attracted hither the eyes of all Europe. And yet in this brilliant resuscitation of our 'fervid genius,' there was nothing truly Scottish, nothing indigenous; except, perhaps, the natural impetuosity of intellect, which we sometimes claim, and are sometimes upbraided with, as a characteristic of our nation. It is curious to remark that Scotland, so full of writers, had no Scottish culture, nor indeed any English; our culture was almost exclusively French. It was by studying Racine and Voltaire, Batteux and Boileau, that Kames had trained himself to be a critic and philosopher; it was the light of Montesquieu and Mably that guided Robertson in his political speculations; Quesnay's lamp that kindled the lamp of Adam Smith. Hume was too rich a man to borrow; and perhaps he reacted on the French more than he was acted on by them: but neither had he aught to do with Scotland; Edinburgh, equally with La Flèche, was but the lodging and laboratory, in which he not so much morally *lived*, as metaphysically *investigated*. Never, perhaps, was there a class of writers

¹ Cf. Introduction, p. 12.

so clear and well-ordered, yet so totally destitute, to all appearance, of any patriotic affection, nay of any human affection whatever. The French wits of the period were as unpatriotic: but their general deficiency in moral principle, not to say their avowed sensuality and unbelief in all virtue, strictly so called, render this accountable enough. We hope, there is a patriotism founded on something better than prejudice; that our country may be dear to us, without injury to our philosophy; that in loving and justly prizing all other lands, we may prize justly, and yet love before all others, our own stern Motherland, and the venerable Structure of social and moral Life, which Mind has through long ages been building up for us there. Surely there is nourishment for the better part of man's heart in all this: surely the roots, that have fixed themselves in the very core of man's being, may be so cultivated as to grow up not into briars, but into roses, in the field of his life! Our Scottish sages have no such propensities: the field of their life shows neither briars nor roses; but only a flat, continuous thrashing-floor for Logic, whereon all questions, from the 'Doctrine of Rent' to the 'Natural History of Religion,' are thrashed and sifted with the same mechanical impartiality!

37. With Sir Walter Scott at the head of our literature, it cannot be denied that much of this evil is past, or rapidly passing away: our chief literary men, whatever other faults they may have, no longer live among us like a French Colony, or some knot of Propaganda Missionaries; but like natural-born subjects of the soil, partaking and sympathising in all our attachments, humours and habits. Our literature no longer grows in water but in mould, and with the true racy virtues of the soil and climate. How much of this change may be due to Burns, or to any other individual, it might be difficult to estimate. Direct liter-

any imitation of Burns was not to be looked for. But his example, in the fearless adoption of domestic subjects, could not but operate from afar; and certainly in no heart did the love of country ever burn with a warmer glow than in that of Burns: 'a tide of Scottish prejudices,' as he modestly calls this deep and generous feeling, 'had been poured along his veins; and he felt that it would boil there till the flood-gates shut in eternal rest.' It seemed to him, as if *he* could do so little for his country, and yet would so gladly have done all. One small province stood open for him,—that of Scottish Song; and how eagerly he entered on it, how devotedly he laboured there! In his toilsome journeyings, this object never quits him; it is the little happy-valley of his careworn heart. In the gloom of his own affliction, he eagerly searches after some lonely brother of the muse, and rejoices to snatch one other name from the oblivion that was covering it! These were early feelings, and they abode with him to the end:

... A wish (I mind its power),
 A wish, that to my latest hour
 Will strongly heave my breast,—
 That I, for poor auld Scotland's sake,
 Some useful plan or book could make,
 Or sing a sang at least.

The rough bur Thistle spreading wide
 Amang the bearded bear,¹
 I turn'd my weeding-clips aside,
 And spared the symbol dear.

38. But to leave the mere literary character of Burns, which has already detained us too long. Far more interesting than any of his written works, as it appears to us, are his acted ones: the Life he willed and was fated to

¹ Barley.

lead among his fellow-men. These Poems are but like little rhymed fragments scattered here and there in the grand unrhymed Romance of his earthly existence; and it is only when intercalated in this at their proper places, that they attain their full measure of significance. And this, too, alas, was but a fragment! The plan of a mighty edifice had been sketched; some columns, porticos, firm masses of building, stand completed; the rest more or less clearly indicated; with many a far-stretching tendency, which only studious and friendly eyes can now trace towards the purposed termination. For the work is broken off in the middle, almost in the beginning; and rises among us, beautiful and sad, at once unfinished and a ruin! If charitable judgment was necessary in estimating his Poems, and justice required that the aim and the manifest power to fulfil it must often be accepted for the fulfilment; much more is this the case in regard to his Life, the sum and result of all his endeavours, where his difficulties came upon him not in detail only, but in mass; and so much has been left unaccomplished, nay was mistaken, and altogether marred.

39. Properly speaking, there is but one era in the life of Burns, and that the earliest. We have not youth and manhood, but only youth: for, to the end, we discern no decisive change in the complexion of his character; in his thirty-seventh year, he is still, as it were, in youth. With all that resoluteness of judgment, that penetrating insight, and singular maturity of intellectual power, exhibited in his writings, he never attains to any clearness regarding himself; to the last, he never ascertains his peculiar aim, even with such distinctness as is common among ordinary men; and therefore never can pursue it with that singleness of will, which insures success and some contentment to such men. To the last, he wavers between two purposes:

glorying in his talent, like a true poet, he yet cannot consent to make this his chief and sole glory, and to follow it as the one thing needful, through poverty or riches, through good or evil report. Another far meaner ambition still cleaves to him; he must dream and struggle about a certain 'Rock of Independence'; which, natural and even admirable as it might be, was still but a warring with the world, on the comparatively insignificant ground of his being more completely or less completely supplied with money than others; of his standing at a higher or at a lower altitude in general estimation than others. For the world still appears to him, as to the young, in borrowed colours: he expects from it what it cannot give to any man; seeks for contentment, not within himself, in action and wise effort, but from without, in the kindness of circumstances, in love, friendship, honour, pecuniary ease. He would be happy, not actively and in himself, but passively and from some ideal cornucopia of Enjoyments, not earned by his own labour, but showered on him by the beneficence of Destiny. Thus, like a young man, he cannot gird himself up for any worthy well-calculated goal, but swerves to and fro, between passionate hope and remorseful disappointment: rushing onwards with a deep tempestuous force, he surmounts or breaks asunder many a barrier; travels, nay advances far, but advancing only under uncertain guidance, is ever and anon turned from his path; and to the last cannot reach the only true happiness of a man, that of clear decided Activity in the sphere for which, by nature and circumstances, he has been fitted and appointed.

40.¹ We do not say these things in dispraise of Burns; nay, perhaps, they but interest us the more in his favour.

¹ Review pp. 10 to 17 of the Introduction and read *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, p. 28.

This blessing is not given soonest to the best; but rather, it is often the greatest minds that are latest in obtaining it; for where most is to be developed, most time may be required to develop it. A complex condition had been assigned him from without; as complex a condition from within: no 'preëstablished harmony' existed between the clay soil of Mossgiel and the empyrean soul of Robert Burns; it was not wonderful that the adjustment between them should have been long postponed, and his arm long cumbered, and his sight confused, in so vast and discordant an economy as he had been appointed steward over. Byron was, at his death, but a year younger than Burns; and through life, as it might have appeared, far more simply situated: yet in him too we can trace no such adjustment, no such moral manhood; but at best, and only a little before his end, the beginning of what seemed such.

41. By much the most striking incident in Burns's Life is his journey to Edinburgh; but perhaps a still more important one is his residence at Irvine, so early as in his twenty-third year. Hitherto his life had been poor and toilworn; but otherwise not ungenial, and, with all its distresses, by no means unhappy. In his parentage, deducting outward circumstances, he had every reason to reckon himself fortunate. His father was a man of thoughtful, intense, earnest character, as the best of our peasants are; valuing knowledge, possessing some, and, what is far better and rarer, openminded for more: a man with a keen insight and devout heart; reverent towards God, friendly therefore at once, and fearless towards all that God has made: in one word, though but a hard-handed peasant, a complete and fully unfolded *Man*. Such a father is seldom found in any rank in society; and was worth descending far in society to seek. Unfortunately, he

was very poor; had he been even a little richer, almost never so little, the whole might have issued far otherwise. Mighty events turn on a straw; the crossing of a brook decides the conquest of the world. Had this William Burns's small seven acres of nursery-ground anywise prospered, the boy Robert had been sent to school; had struggled forward, as so many weaker men do, to some university; come forth not as a rustic wonder, but as a regular well-trained intellectual workman, and changed the whole course of British Literature,—for it lay in him to have done this! But the nursery did not prosper; poverty sank his whole family below the help of even our cheap school-system: Burns remained a hard-worked ploughboy, and British literature took its own course. Nevertheless, even in this rugged scene there is much to nourish him. If he drudges, it is with his brother, and for his father and mother, whom he loves, and would fain shield from want. Wisdom is not banished from their poor hearth, nor the balm of natural feeling: the solemn words, *Let us worship God*, are heard there from a 'priest-like father'; if threatenings or unjust men throw mother and children into tears, these are tears not of grief only, but of holiest affection; every heart in that humble group feels itself the closer knit to every other; in their hard warfare they are there together, a 'little band of brethren.' Neither are such tears, and the deep beauty that dwells in them, their only portion. Light visits the hearts as it does the eyes of all living: there is a force, too, in this youth, that enables him to trample on misfortune; nay to bind it under his feet to make him sport. For a bold, warm, buoyant humour of character has been given him; and so the thick-coming shapes of evil are welcomed with a gay, friendly irony, and in their closest pressure he bates no jot of heart or hope. Vague yearnings of ambition fail not, as he grows up; dreamy

fancies hang like cloud-cities around him; the curtain of Existence is slowly rising, in many-coloured splendour and gloom: and the auroral light of first love is gilding his horizon, and the music of song is on his path; and so he walks

. in glory and in joy,
Behind his plough, upon the mountain side.

42. We ourselves know, from the best evidence, that up to this date Burns was happy; nay that he was the gayest, brightest, most fantastic, fascinating being to be found in the world; more so even than he ever afterwards appeared. But now, at this early age, he quits the paternal roof; goes forth into looser, louder, more exciting society; and becomes initiated in those dissipations, those vices, which a certain class of philosophers have asserted to be a natural preparative for entering on active life; a kind of mud-bath, in which the youth is, as it were, necessitated to steep, and, we suppose, cleanse himself, before the real toga of Manhood can be laid on him. We shall not dispute much with this class of philosophers; we hope they are mistaken; for Sin and Remorse so easily beset us at all stages of life, and are always such indifferent company, that it seems hard we should, at any stage, be forced and fated not only to meet but to yield to them, and even serve for a term in their leprous armada. We hope it is not so. Clear we are, at all events, it cannot be the training one receives in this Devil's service, but only our determining to desert from it, that fits us for true manly Action. We become men, not after we have been dissipated, and disappointed in the chase of false pleasure; but after we have ascertained, in any way, what impassable barriers hem us in through this life; how mad it is to hope for contentment to our infinite soul from the *gifts* of this extremely

finite world; that a man must be sufficient for himself; and that for suffering and enduring there is no remedy but striving and doing. Manhood begins when we have in any way made truce with Necessity; begins even when we have surrendered to Necessity, as the most part only do; but begins joyfully and hopefully only when we have reconciled ourselves to Necessity; and thus, in reality, triumphed over it, and felt that in Necessity we are free. Surely, such lessons as this last, which, in one shape or other, is the grand lesson for every mortal man, are better learned from the lips of a devout mother, in the looks and actions of a devout father, while the heart is yet soft and pliant, than in collision with the sharp adamant of Fate, attracting us to shipwreck us, when the heart is grown hard, and may be broken before it will become contrite. Had Burns continued to learn this, as he was already learning it, in his father's cottage, he would have learned it fully, which he never did; and been saved many a lasting aberration, many a bitter hour and year of remorseful sorrow.

43. It seems to us another circumstance of fatal import in Burns's history, that at this time too he became involved in the religious quarrels of his district; that he was enlisted and feasted, as the fighting man of the New-Light Priesthood,¹ in their highly unprofitable warfare. At the tables of these free-minded clergy he learned much more than was needful for him. Such liberal ridicule of fanaticism awakened in his mind scruples about Religion itself; and a whole world of Doubts, which it required quite another set of conjurors than these men to exorcise. We do not say that such an intellect as his could have escaped similar doubts at some period of his history; or

¹ Cf. Introduction, p. 12.

even that he could, at a later period, have come through them altogether victorious and unharmed: but it seems peculiarly unfortunate that this time, above all others, should have been fixed for the encounter. For now, with principles assailed by evil example from without, by 'passions raging like demons' from within, he had little need of sceptical misgivings to whisper treason in the heat of the battle, or to cut off his retreat if he were already defeated. He loses his feeling of innocence; his mind is at variance with itself; the old divinity no longer presides there; but wild Desires and wild Repentance alternately oppress him. Ere long, too, he has committed himself before the world; his character for sobriety, dear to a Scottish peasant as few corrupted worldlings can even conceive, is destroyed in the eyes of men; and his only refuge consists in trying to disbelieve his guiltiness, and is but a refuge of lies. The blackest desperation now gathers over him, broken only by red lightnings of remorse. The whole fabric of his life is blasted asunder; for now not only his character, but his personal liberty, is to be lost; men and Fortune are leagued for his hurt; 'hungry Ruin has him in the wind.' He sees no escape but the saddest of all: exile¹ from his loved country, to a country in every sense inhospitable and abhorrent to him. While the 'gloomy night is gathering fast,' in mental storm and solitude, as well as in physical, he sings his wild farewell to Scotland:

Farewell, my friends; farewell, my foes!
My peace with these, my love with those:
The bursting tears my heart declare;
Adieu, my native banks of Ayr!²

44. Light breaks suddenly in on him in floods; but still a false transitory light, and no real sunshine. He is in-

¹ Cf. Introduction, p. 13.

² Read the poem, p. 37.

vited to Edinburgh; hastens thither with anticipating heart; is welcomed as in a triumph, and with universal blandishments and acclamation; whatever is wisest, whatever is greatest or loveliest there, gathers round him, to gaze on his face, to show him honour, sympathy, affection. Burns's appearance among the sages and nobles of Edinburgh must be regarded as one of the most singular phenomena in modern Literature; almost like the appearance of some Napoleon among the crowned sovereigns of modern Politics. For it is nowise as 'a mockery king,' set there by favour, transiently and for a purpose, that he will let himself be treated; still less is he a mad Rienzi, whose sudden elevation turns his too weak head: but he stands there on his own basis; cool, unastonished, holding his equal rank from Nature herself; putting forth no claim which there is not strength *in* him, as well as about him, to vindicate. Mr. Lockhart has some forcible observations on this point:

45. 'It needs no effort of imagination,' says he, 'to conceive what the sensations of an isolated set of scholars (almost all either clergymen or professors) must have been in the presence of this big-boned, black-browed, brawny stranger, with his great flashing eyes, who, having forced his way among them from the plough-tail at a single stride, manifested in the whole strain of his bearing and conversation a most thorough conviction, that in the society of the most eminent men of his nation he was exactly where he was entitled to be; hardly deigned to flatter them by exhibiting even an occasional symptom of being flattered by their notice; by turns calmly measured himself against the most cultivated understandings of his time in discussion; overpowered the *bon mots* of the most celebrated convivialists by broad floods of merriment, impregnated with all the burning life of genius; astounded bosoms habitually enveloped in the thrice-piled folds of social reserve, by compelling them

to tremble,—nay, to tremble visibly,—beneath the fearless touch of natural pathos; and all this without indicating the smallest willingness to be ranked among those professional ministers of excitement, who are content to be paid in money and smiles for doing what the spectators and auditors would be ashamed of doing in their own persons, even if they had the power of doing it; and last, and probably worst of all, who was known to be in the habit of enlivening societies which they would have scorned to approach, still more frequently than their own, with eloquence no less magnificent; with wit, in all likelihood still more daring; often enough, as the superiors whom he fronted without alarm might have guessed from the beginning, and had ere long no occasion to guess, with wit pointed at themselves.'

46. The farther we remove from this scene, the more singular will it seem to us: details of the exterior aspect of it are already full of interest. Most readers recollect Mr. Walker's personal interviews with Burns as among the best passages of his Narrative: a time will come when this reminiscence of Sir Walter Scott's, slight though it is, will also be precious:

47. 'As for Burns,' writes Sir Walter, 'I may truly say, *Virgilium vidi tantum*. I was a lad of fifteen in 1786-7, when he came first to Edinburgh, but had sense and feeling enough to be much interested in his poetry, and would have given the world to know him: but I had very little acquaintance with any literary people, and still less with the gentry of the west country, the two sets that he most frequented. Mr. Thomas Grierson was at that time a clerk of my father's. He knew Burns, and promised to ask him to his lodgings to dinner; but had no opportunity to keep his word; otherwise I might have seen more of this distinguished man. As it was, I saw him one day at the late venerable Professor Ferguson's, where there were several gentlemen of literary reputation, among whom I remembered the celebrated Mr.

Dugald Stewart. Of course, we youngsters sat silent, looked and listened. The only thing I remember which was remarkable in Burns's manner, was the effect produced upon him by a print of Bunbury's, representing a soldier lying dead on the snow, his dog sitting in misery on one side,—on the other, his widow, with a child in her arms. These lines were written beneath:

“Cold on Canadian hills, or Minden's plain,
Perhaps that mother wept her soldier slain;
Bent o'er her babe, her eye dissolved in dew,
The big drops mingling with the milk he drew,
Gave the sad presage of his future years,
The child of misery baptised in tears.”

48. ‘Burns seemed much affected by the print, or rather by the ideas which it suggested to his mind. He actually shed tears. He asked whose the lines were; and it chanced that nobody but myself remembered that they occur in a half-forgotten poem of Langhorne's called by the unpromising title of “The Justice of Peace.” I whispered my information to a friend present; he mentioned it to Burns, who rewarded me with a look and a word, which, though of mere civility, I then received and still recollect with very great pleasure.

49. ‘His person was strong and robust; his manners rustic, not clownish; a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity, which received part of its effect perhaps from one's knowledge of his extraordinary talents. His features are represented in Mr. Nasmyth's picture: but to me it conveys the idea that they are diminished, as if seen in perspective. I think his countenance was more massive than it looks in any of the portraits. I should have taken the poet, had I not known what he was, for a very sagacious country farmer of the old Scotch school, *i.e.* none of your modern agriculturists who keep labourers for their drudgery, but the *douce gudeman*¹ who held his own plough. There was a strong

¹ Gentle goodman.

expression of sense and shrewdness in all his lineaments; the eye alone, I think, indicated the poetical character and temperament. It was large, and of a dark cast, which glowed (I say literally *glowed*) when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men of my time. His conversation expressed perfect self-confidence, without the slightest presumption. Among the men who were the most learned of their time and country, he expressed himself with perfect firmness, but without the least intrusive forwardness; and when he differed in opinion, he did not hesitate to express it firmly, yet at the same time with modesty. I do not remember any part of his conversation distinctly enough to be quoted; nor did I ever see him again, except in the street, where he did not recognise me, as I could not expect he should. He was much caressed in Edinburgh: but (considering what literary emoluments have been since his day) the efforts made for his relief were extremely trifling.

50. 'I remember, on this occasion I mention, I thought Burns's acquaintance with English poetry was rather limited; and also that, having twenty times the abilities of Allan Ramsay and of Ferguson, he talked of them with too much humility as his models: there was doubtless national predilection in his estimate.

51. 'This is all I can tell you about Burns. I have only to add, that his dress corresponded with his manner. He was like a farmer dressed in his best to dine with the laird. I do not speak *in malam partem*, when I say, I never saw a man in company with his superiors in station or information more perfectly free from either the reality or the affectation of embarrassment. I was told, but did not observe it, that his address to females was extremely deferential, and always with a turn either to the pathetic or humorous, which engaged their attention particularly. I have heard the late Duchess of Gordon remark this.—I do not know anything I can add to these recollections of forty years since.'

52. The conduct of Burns under this dazzling blaze of favour; the calm, unaffected, manly manner in which he not only bore it, but estimated its value, has justly been regarded as the best proof that could be given of his real vigour and integrity of mind. A little natural vanity, some touches of hypocritical modesty, some glimmerings of affectation, at least some fear of being thought affected, we could have pardoned in almost any man; but no such indication is to be traced here. In his unexampled situation the young peasant is not a moment perplexed; so many strange lights do not confuse him, do not lead him astray. Nevertheless, we cannot but perceive that this winter did him great and lasting injury. A somewhat clearer knowledge of men's affairs, scarcely of their characters, it did afford him; but a sharper feeling of Fortune's unequal arrangements in their social destiny it also left with him. He had seen the gay and gorgeous arena, in which the powerful are born to play their parts; nay had himself stood in the midst of it; and he felt more bitterly than ever, that here he was but a looker-on, and had no part or lot in that splendid game. From this time a jealous indignant fear of social degradation takes possession of him; and perverts, so far as aught could pervert, his private contentment, and his feelings towards his richer fellows. It was clear to Burns that he had talent enough to make a fortune, or a hundred fortunes, could he but have rightly willed this; it was clear also that he willed something far different, and therefore could not make one. Unhappy it was that he had not power to choose the one, and reject the other; but must halt forever between two opinions, two objects; making hampered advancement towards either. But so is it with many men: we 'long for the merchandise, yet would fain keep the price;' and so stand chaffering with Fate, in

vexatious altercation, till the night come, and our fair is over!

53. The Edinburgh Learned of that period were in general more noted for clearness of head than for warmth of heart: with the exception of the good old Blacklock, whose help was too ineffectual, scarcely one among them seems to have looked at Burns with any true sympathy, or indeed much otherwise than as at a highly curious *thing*. By the great also he is treated in the customary fashion; entertained at their tables and dismissed: certain modica of pudding and praise are, from time to time, gladly exchanged for the fascination of his presence; which exchange once effected, the bargain is finished, and each party goes his several way. At the end of this strange season, Burns gloomily sums up his gains and losses, and meditates on the chaotic future. In money he is somewhat richer; in fame and the show of happiness, infinitely richer; but in the substance of it, as poor as ever. Nay poorer; for his heart is now maddened still more with the fever of worldly Ambition; and through long years the disease will rack him with unprofitable sufferings, and weaken his strength for all true and nobler aims.

54. What Burns was next to do or to avoid; how a man so circumstanced was now to guide himself towards his true advantage, might at this point of time have been a question for the wisest. It was a question too, which apparently he was left altogether to answer for himself: of his learned or rich patrons it had not struck any individual to turn a thought on this so trivial matter. Without claiming for Burns the praise of perfect sagacity, we must say, that his Excise and Farm scheme¹ does not seem to us a very unreasonable one; that we should be at a loss,

¹ Cf. Introduction, p. 14.

even now, to suggest one decidedly better. Certain of his admirers have felt scandalised at his ever resolving to *gauge*; and would have had him lie at the pool, till the spirit of Patronage² stirred the waters, that so, with one friendly plunge, all his sorrows might be healed. Unwise counsellors! They know not the manner of this spirit; and how, in the lap of most golden dreams, a man might have happiness, were it not that in the interim he must die of hunger! It reflects credit on the manliness and sound sense of Burns, that he felt so early on what ground he was standing; and preferred self-help, on the humblest scale, to dependence and inaction, though with hope of far more splendid possibilities. But even these possibilities were not rejected in his scheme: he might expect, if it chanced that he *had* any friend, to rise, in no long period, into something even like opulence and leisure; while again, if it chanced that he had no friend, he could still live in security; and for the rest, he 'did not intend to borrow honour from any profession.' We reckon that his plan was honest and well calculated: all turned on the execution of it. Doubtless it failed; yet not, we believe, from any vice inherent in itself. Nay, after all, it was no failure of external means, but of internal, that overtook Burns. His was no bankruptcy of the purse, but of the soul; to his last day, he owed no man anything.

55. Meanwhile he begins well: with two good and wise actions. His donation to his mother, munificent from a man whose income had lately been seven pounds a-year, was worthy of him, and not more than worthy. Generous also, and worthy of him, was the treatment of the woman whose life's welfare now depended on his pleasure. A friendly observer might have hoped serene days for him:

² Cf. Introduction, p. 17.

his mind is on the true road to peace with itself: what clearness he still wants will be given as he proceeds; for the best teacher of duties, that still lie dim to us, is the Practice of those we see and have at hand. Had the 'patrons of genius,' who could give him nothing, but taken nothing from him, at least nothing more! The wounds of his heart would have healed, vulgar ambition would have died away. Toil and Frugality would have been welcome, since Virtue dwelt with them; and Poetry would have shone through them as of old: and in her clear ethereal light, which was his own by birthright, he might have looked down on his earthly destiny, and all its obstructions, not with patience only, but with love.

56. But the patrons of genius would not have it so. Picturesque tourists,¹ all manner of fashionable dangles after literature, and, far worse, all manner of convivial Mæcenases, hovered round him in his retreat; and his good as well as his weak qualities secured them influence over him. He was flattered by their notice; and his warm

¹ There is one little sketch by certain 'English gentlemen' of this class, which, though adopted in Currie's Narrative, and since then repeated in most others, we have all along felt an invincible disposition to regard as imaginary: 'On a rock that projected into the stream, they saw a man employed in angling, of a singular appearance. He had a cap made of fox-skin on his head, a loose greatcoat fixed round him by a belt, from which depended an enormous Highland broad-sword. It was Burns.' Now, we rather think, it was *not* Burns. For, to say nothing of the fox-skin cap, the loose and quite Hibernian watchcoat with the belt, what are we to make of this 'enormous Highland broad-sword' depending from him? More especially, as there is no word of parish constables on the outlook to see whether, as Dennis phrases it, he had an eye to his own midriff or that of the public! Burns, of all men, had the least need, and the least tendency, to seek for distinction, either in his own eyes, or those of others, by such poor mummeries. (Carlyle's note.)

social nature made it impossible for him to shake them off, and hold on his way apart from them. These men, as we believe, were proximately the means of his ruin. Not that they meant him any ill; they only meant themselves a little good; if he suffered harm, let *him* look to it! But they wasted his precious time and his precious talent; they disturbed his composure, broke down his returning habits of temperance and assiduous contented exertion. Their pampering was baneful to him; their cruelty, which soon followed, was equally baneful. The old grudge against Fortune's inequality awoke with new bitterness in their neighbourhood; and Burns had no retreat but to 'the Rock of Independence,' which is but an air-castle after all, that looks well at a distance, but will screen no one from real wind and wet. Flushed with irregular excitement, exasperated alternately by contempt of others, and contempt of himself, Burns was no longer regaining his peace of mind, but fast losing it forever. There was a hollowness at the heart of his life, for his conscience did not now approve what he was doing.

57. Amid the vapours of unwise enjoyment, of bootless remorse, and angry discontent with Fate, his true loadstar, a life of Poetry, with Poverty, nay with Famine if it must be so, was too often altogether hidden from his eyes. And yet he sailed a sea, where without some such loadstar there was no right steering. Meteors of French Politics rise before him, but these were not *his* stars. An accident this, which hastened, but did not originate, his worst distresses. In the mad contentions of that time, he comes in collision with certain official Superiors;¹ is wounded by them; cruelly lacerated, we should say, could a dead mechanical implement, in any case, be called cruel: and

¹ Cf. Introduction, p. 15.

shrinks, in indignant pain, into deeper self-seclusion, into gloomier moodiness than ever. His life has now lost its unity: it is a life of fragments; led with little aim, beyond the melancholy one of securing its own continuance,—in fits of wild false joy when such offered, and of black despondency when they passed away. His character before the world begins to suffer: calumny is busy with him; for a miserable man makes more enemies than friends. Some faults he has fallen into, and a thousand misfortunes; but deep criminality is what he stands accused of, and they that are *not* without sin cast the first stone at him! For is he not a wellwisher to the French Revolution, a Jacobin, and therefore in that one act guilty of all? These accusations, political and moral, it has since appeared, were false enough: but the world hesitated little to credit them. Nay his convivial Mæcenases themselves were not the last to do it. There is reason to believe that, in his later years, the Dumfries Aristocracy had partly withdrawn themselves from Burns, as from a tainted person, no longer worthy of their acquaintance. That painful class, stationed, in all provincial cities, behind the outmost breastwork of Gentility, there to stand siege and do battle against the intrusions of Grocerdom and Grazierdom, had actually seen dishonour in the society of Burns, and branded him with their veto; had, as we vulgarly say, *cut* him! We find one passage in this Work of Mr. Lockhart's, which will not out of our thoughts:

58. 'A gentleman of that county, whose name I have already more than once had occasion to refer to, has often told me that he was seldom more grieved, than when riding into Dumfries one fine summer evening about this time to attend a county ball, he saw Burns walking alone, on the shady side of the principal street of the town, while the opposite side was gay with successive groups of gentlemen

and ladies, all drawn together for the festivities of the night, not one of whom appeared willing to recognise him. The horseman dismounted, and joined Burns, who on his proposing to cross the street said: "Nay, nay, my young friend, that's all over now;" and quoted, after a pause, some verses of Lady Grizzel Baillie's pathetic ballad:

"His bonnet stood ance fu' fair on his brow,
His auld ane look'd better than mony ane's new;
But now he lets 't wear ony way it will hing,
And casts himsell dowie ¹ upon the corn-bing.

O, were we young as we ance hae been,
We sud hae been galloping down on yon green,
And linking ² it ower the lily-white lea!
And werena my heart light, I wad die."

It was little in Burns's character to let his feelings on certain subjects escape in this fashion. He, immediately after reciting these verses, assumed the sprightliness of his most pleasing manner; and taking his young friend home with him, entertained him very agreeably till the hour of the ball arrived.'

59. Alas! when we think that Burns now sleeps 'where bitter indignation can no longer lacerate his heart,' ³ and that most of those fair dames and frizzled gentlemen already lie at his side, where the breastwork of gentility is quite thrown down,—who would not sigh over the thin delusions and foolish toys that divide heart from heart, and make man unmerciful to his brother!

60. It was not now to be hoped that the genius of Burns would ever reach maturity, or accomplish aught worthy of itself. His spirit was jarred in its melody; not the soft breath of natural feeling, but the rude hand of Fate,

¹ Worn-out.

² Tripping.

³ *Ubi sæva indignatio cor ulterius lacerare nequit.*—Swift's Epitaph. (Carlyle's note.) This epitaph Swift wrote himself.

was now sweeping over the strings. And yet what harmony was in him, what music even in his discords! How the wild tones had a charm for the simplest and the wisest; and all men felt and knew that here also was one of the Gifted! 'If he entered an inn at midnight, after all the inmates were in bed, the news of his arrival circulated from the cellar to the garret; and ere ten minutes had elapsed, the landlord and all his guests were assembled!' Some brief pure moments of poetic life were yet appointed him, in the composition of his Songs. We can understand how he grasped at this employment; and how too, he spurned all other reward for it but what the labour itself brought him. For the soul of Burns, though scathed and marred, was yet living in its full moral strength, though sharply conscious of its errors and abasement: and here, in his destitution and degradation, was one act of seeming nobleness and self-devotedness left even for him to perform. He felt too, that with all the 'thoughtless follies' that had 'laid him low,' the world was unjust and cruel to him; and he silently appealed to another and calmer time. Not as a hired soldier, but as a patriot, would he strive for the glory of his country: so he cast from him the poor sixpence a day, and served zealously as a volunteer. Let us not grudge him this last luxury of his existence; let him not have appealed to us in vain! The money was not necessary to him; he struggled through without it: long since, these guineas would have been gone, and now the highmindedness of refusing them will plead for him in all hearts forever.

61. We are here arrived at the crisis of Burns's life; for matters had now taken such a shape with him as could not long continue. If improvement was not to be looked for, Nature could only for a limited time maintain this dark and maddening warfare against the world and itself.

We are not medically informed whether any continuance of years was, at this period, probable for Burns; whether his death is to be looked on as in some sense an accidental event, or only as the natural consequence of the long series of events that had preceded. The latter seems to be the likelier opinion; and yet it is by no means a certain one. At all events, as we have said, *some* change could not be very distant. Three gates of deliverance, it seems to us, were open for Burns: clear poetical activity; madness; or death. The first, with longer life, was still possible, though not probable; for physical causes were beginning to be concerned in it: and yet Burns had an iron resolution; could he but have seen and felt, that not only his highest glory, but his first duty, and the true medicine for all his woes, lay here. The second was still less probable; for his mind was ever among the clearest and firmest. So the milder third gate was opened for him: and he passed, not softly yet speedily, into that still country, where the hail-storms and fire-showers do not reach, and the heaviest-laden wayfarer at length lays down his load!

62. Contemplating this sad end of Burns, and how he sank unaided by any real help, uncheered by any wise sympathy, generous minds have sometimes figured to themselves, with a reproachful sorrow, that much might have been done for him; that by counsel, true affection and friendly ministrations, he might have been saved to himself and the world. We question whether there is not more tenderness of heart than soundness of judgment in these suggestions. It seems dubious to us whether the richest, wisest, most benevolent individual could have lent Burns any effectual help. Counsel, which seldom profits any one, he did not need; in his understanding, he knew the right from the wrong, as well perhaps as any man ever did; but the persuasion, which would have availed him, lies not

so much in the head as in the heart, where no argument or expostulation could have assisted much to implant it. As to money again, we do not believe that this was his essential want; or well see how any private man could, even presupposing Burns's consent, have bestowed on him an independent fortune, with much prospect of decisive advantage. It is a mortifying truth, that two men in any rank of society, could hardly be found virtuous enough to give money, and to take it as a necessary gift, without injury to the moral entireness of one or both. But so stands the fact: Friendship, in the old heroic sense of that term, no longer exists; except in the cases of kindred or other legal affinity, it is in reality no longer expected, or recognised as a virtue among men. A close observer of manners has pronounced 'Patronage,' that is, pecuniary or other economic furtherance, to be 'twice cursed'; cursing him that gives, and him that takes! And thus, in regard to outward matters also, it has become the rule, as in regard to inward it always was and must be the rule, that no one shall look for effectual help to another; but that each shall rest contented with what help he can afford himself. Such, we say, is the principle of modern Honour; naturally enough growing out of that sentiment of Pride, which we inculcate and encourage as the basis of our whole social morality. Many a poet has been poorer than Burns; but no one was ever prouder: we may question whether, without great precautions, even a pension from Royalty would not have galled and encumbered, more than actually assisted him.

63. Still less, therefore, are we disposed to join with another class of Burns's admirers, who accuse the higher ranks among us of having ruined Burns by their selfish neglect of him. We have already stated our doubts whether direct pecuniary help, had it been offered, would have been

accepted, or could have proved very effectual. We shall readily admit, however, that much was to be done for Burns; that many a poisoned arrow might have been warded from his bosom; many an entanglement in his path cut asunder by the hand of the powerful; and light and heat, shed on him from high places, would have made his humble atmosphere more genial; and the softest heart then breathing might have lived and died with some fewer pangs. Nay, we shall grant farther, and for Burns it is granting much, that, with all his pride, he would have thanked, even with exaggerated gratitude, any one who had cordially befriended him: patronage, unless once cursed, needed not to have been twice so. At all events, the poor promotion he desired in his calling might have been granted: it was his own scheme, therefore likelier than any other to be of service. All this it might have been a luxury, nay it was a duty, for our nobility to have done. No part of all this, however, did any of them do; or apparently attempt, or wish to do: so much is granted against them. But what then is the amount of their blame? Simply that they were men of the world, and walked by the principles of such men; that they treated Burns, as other nobles and other commoners had done other poets; as the English did Shakspeare; as King Charles and his Cavaliers did Butler, as King Philip and his Grandees did Cervantes. Do men gather grapes of thorns; or shall we cut down our thorns for yielding only a *fence* and haws? How, indeed, could the 'nobility and gentry of his native land' hold out any help to this 'Scottish Bard, proud of his name and country'? Were the nobility and gentry so much as able rightly to help themselves? Had they not their game to preserve; their borough interests to strengthen; dinners, therefore, of various kinds to eat and give? Were their means more than adequate to

all this business, or less than adequate? Less than adequate, in general; few of them in reality were richer than Burns; many of them were poorer; for sometimes they had to wring their supplies, as with thumbscrews, from the hard hand; and, in their need of guineas, to forget their duty of mercy; which Burns was never reduced to do. Let us pity and forgive them. The game they preserved and shot, the dinners they ate and gave, the borough interests they strengthened, the *little* Babylons they severally builded by the glory of their might, are all melted or melting back into the primeval Chaos, as man's merely selfish endeavours are fated to do: and here was an action, extending, in virtue of its worldly influence, we may say, through all time; in virtue of its moral nature, beyond all time, being immortal as the Spirit of Goodness itself; this action was offered them to do, and light was not given them to do it. Let us pity and forgive them. But better than pity, let us go and *do otherwise*. Human suffering did not end with the life of Burns; neither was the solemn mandate, 'Love one another, bear one another's burdens,' given to the rich only, but to all men. True, we shall find no Burns to relieve, to assuage by our aid or our pity; but celestial natures, groaning under the fardels of a weary life, we shall still find; and that wretchedness which Fate has rendered *voiceless* and *tuneless* is not the least wretched, but the most.

64. Still, we do not think that the blame of Burns's failure lies chiefly with the world. The world, it seems to us, treated him with more rather than with less kindness than it usually shows to such men. It has ever, we fear, shown but small favour to its Teachers: hunger and nakedness, perils and revilings, the prison, the cross, the poison-chalice have, in most times and countries, been the market-price it has offered for Wisdom, the welcome with which

it has greeted those who have come to enlighten and purify it. Homer and Socrates, and the Christian Apostles, belong to old days; but the world's Martyrology was not completed with these. Roger Bacon and Galileo languish in priestly dungeons; Tasso pines in the cell of a madhouse; Camoens dies begging on the streets of Lisbon. So neglected, so 'persecuted they the Prophets,' not in Judea only, but in all places where men have been. We reckon that every poet of Burns's order is, or should be, a prophet and teacher to his age; that he has no right to expect great kindness from it, but rather is bound to do it great kindness; that Burns, in particular, experienced fully the usual proportion of the world's goodness; and that the blame of his failure, as we have said, lies not chiefly with the world.

65. Where, then, does it lie? We are forced to answer: With himself; it is his inward, not his outward misfortunes that bring him to the dust. Seldom, indeed, is it otherwise; seldom is a life morally wrecked but the grand cause lies in some internal mal-arrangement, some want less of good fortune than of good guidance. Nature fashions no creature without implanting in it the strength needful for its action and duration; least of all does she so neglect her masterpiece and darling, the poetic soul. Neither can we believe that it is in the power of *any* external circumstances utterly to ruin the mind of a man; nay if proper wisdom be given him, even so much as to affect its essential health and beauty. The sternest sum-total of all worldly misfortunes is Death; nothing more *can* lie in the cup of human woe: yet many men, in all ages, have triumphed over Death, and led it captive; converting its physical victory into a moral victory for themselves, into a seal and immortal consecration for all that their past life had achieved. What has been done, may be

done again: nay, it is but the degree and not the kind of such heroism that differs in different seasons; for without some portion of this spirit, not of boisterous daring, but of silent fearlessness, of Self-denial in all its forms, no good man, in any scene or time, has ever attained to be good.

66. We have already stated the error of Burns; and mourned over it, rather than blamed it. It was the want of unity in his purposes, of consistency in his aims; the hapless attempt to mingle in friendly union the common spirit of the world with the spirit of poetry, which is of a far different and altogether irreconcilable nature. Burns was nothing wholly, and Burns could be nothing, no man formed as he was can be anything, by halves. The heart, not of a mere hot-blooded, popular Verse-monger, or poetical *Restaurateur*, but of a true Poet and Singer, worthy of the old religious heroic times, had been given him: and he fell in an age, not of heroism and religion, but of scepticism, selfishness and triviality, when true Nobleness was little understood; and its place supplied by a hollow, dissocial, altogether barren and unfruitful principle of Pride. The influences of that age, his open, kind, susceptible nature, to say nothing of his highly untoward situation, made it more than usually difficult for him to cast aside, or rightly subordinate; the better spirit that was within him ever sternly demanded its rights, its supremacy: he spent his life in endeavouring to reconcile these two; and lost it, as he must lose it, without reconciling them.

67. Burns was born poor; and born also to continue poor, for he would not endeavour to be otherwise: this it had been well could he have once for all admitted, and considered as finally settled. He was poor, truly; but hundreds even of his own class and order of minds have been poorer, yet have suffered nothing deadly from it: nay, his own Father had a far sorer battle with ungrateful

destiny than his was; and he did not yield to it, but died courageously warring, and to all moral intents prevailing, against it. True, Burns had little means, had even little time for poetry, his only real pursuit and vocation; but so much the more precious was what little he had. In all these external respects his case was hard; but very far from the hardest. Poverty, incessant drudgery and much worse evils, it has often been the lot of Poets and wise men to strive with, and their glory to conquer. Locke was banished as a traitor; and wrote his *Essay on the Human Understanding* sheltering himself in a Dutch garret. Was Milton rich or at his ease when he composed *Paradise Lost*? Not only low, but fallen from a height; not only poor, but impoverished; in darkness and with dangers compassed round, he sang his immortal song, and found fit audience, though few. Did not Cervantes finish his work, a maimed soldier and in prison? Nay, was not the *Araucana*, which Spain acknowledges as its Epic, written without even the aid of paper; on scraps of leather, as the stout fighter and voyager snatched any moment from that wild warfare?

68. And what, then, had these men, which Burns wanted? Two things; both which, it seems to us, are indispensable for such men. They had a true, religious principle of morals; and a single, not a double aim in their activity. They were not self-seekers and self-worshippers; but seekers and worshippers of something far better than Self. Not personal enjoyment was their object; but a high, heroic idea of Religion, of Patriotism, of heavenly Wisdom, in one or the other form, ever hovered before them; in which cause they neither shrank from suffering, nor called on the earth to witness it as something wonderful; but patiently endured, counting it blessedness enough so to spend and be spent. Thus the

‘golden-calf of Self-love,’ however curiously carved, was not their Deity; but the Invisible Goodness, which alone is man’s reasonable service. This feeling was as a celestial fountain, whose streams refreshed into gladness and beauty all the provinces of their otherwise too desolate existence. In a word, they willed one thing, to which all other things were subordinated and made subservient; and therefore they accomplished it. The wedge will rend rocks; but its edge must be sharp and single: if it be double, the wedge is bruised in pieces and will rend nothing.

69. Part of this superiority these men owed to their age; in which heroism and devotedness were still practised, or at least not yet disbelieved in: but much of it likewise they owed to themselves. With Burns, again, it was different. His morality, in most of its practical points, is that of a mere worldly man; enjoyment, in a finer or coarser shape, is the only thing he longs and strives for. A noble instinct sometimes raises him above this; but an instinct only, and acting only for moments. He has no Religion; in the shallow age, where his days were cast, Religion was not discriminated from the New and Old Light *forms* of Religion; and was, with these, becoming obsolete in the minds of men. His heart, indeed, is alive with a trembling adoration, but there is no temple in his understanding. He lives in darkness and in the shadow of doubt. His religion, at best, is an anxious wish; like that of Rabelais, ‘a great Perhaps.’

70. He loved Poetry warmly, and in his heart; could he but have loved it purely, and with his whole undivided heart, it had been well. For Poetry, as Burns could have followed it, is but another form of Wisdom, of Religion; is itself Wisdom and Religion. But this also was denied him. His poetry is a stray vagrant gleam, which will not

be extinguished within him, yet rises not to be the true light of his path, but is often a wildfire that misleads him. It was not necessary for Burns to be rich, to be, or to seem, 'independent'; but it *was* necessary for him to be at one with his own heart; to place what was highest in his nature highest also in his life; 'to seek within himself for that consistency and sequence, which external events would forever refuse him.' He was born a poet; poetry was the celestial element of his being, and should have been the soul of his whole endeavours. Lifted into that serene ether, whither he had wings given him to mount, he would have needed no other elevation: poverty, neglect and all evil, save the desecration of himself and his Art, were a small matter to him; the pride and the passions of the world lay far beneath his feet; and he looked down alike on noble and slave, on prince and beggar, and all that wore the stamp of man, with clear recognition, with brotherly affection, with sympathy, with pity. Nay, we question whether for his culture as a Poet, poverty and much suffering for a season were not absolutely advantageous. Great men, in looking back over their lives, have testified to that effect. 'I would not for much,' says Jean Paul, 'that I had been born richer.' And yet Paul's birth was poor enough; for, in another place, he adds: 'The prisoner's allowance is bread and water; and I had often only the latter.' But the gold that is refined in the hottest furnace comes out the purest; or, as he has himself expressed it, 'the canary-bird sings sweeter the longer it has been trained in a darkened cage.'

71. A man like Burns might have divided his hours between poetry and virtuous industry; industry which all true feeling sanctions, nay prescribes, and which has a beauty, for that cause, beyond the pomp of thrones: but to divide his hours between poetry and rich men's

banquets was an ill-starred and inauspicious attempt. How could he be at ease at such banquets? What had he to do there, mingling his music with the coarse roar of altogether earthly voices; brightening the thick smoke of intoxication with fire lent him from heaven? Was it his aim to *enjoy* life? Tomorrow he must go drudge as an Exciseman! We wonder not that Burns became moody, indignant, and at times an offender against certain rules of society; but rather that he did not grow utterly frantic, and run *amuck* against them all. How could a man, so falsely placed, by his own or others' fault, ever know contentment or peaceable diligence for an hour? What he did, under such perverse guidance, and what he forbore to do, alike fill us with astonishment at the natural strength and worth of his character.

72. Doubtless there was a remedy for this perverseness; but not in others; only in himself; least of all in simple increase of wealth and worldly 'respectability.' We hope we have now heard enough about the efficacy of wealth for poetry, and to make poets happy. Nay have we not seen another instance of it in these very days? Byron, a man of an endowment considerably less ethereal than that of Burns, is born in the rank not of a Scottish ploughman, but of an English peer: the highest worldly honours, the fairest worldly career, are his by inheritance; the richest harvest of fame he soon reaps, in another province, by his own hand. And what does all this avail him? Is he happy, is he good, is he true? Alas, he has a poet's soul, and strives towards the Infinite and the Eternal; and soon feels that all this is but mounting to the house-top to reach the stars! Like Burns, he is only a proud man; might, like him, have 'purchased a pocket-copy of Milton to study the character of Satan'; for Satan also is Byron's grand exemplar, the hero of his poetry, and the model

apparently of his conduct. As in Burns's case too, the celestial element will not mingle with the clay of earth; both poet and man of the world he must not be; vulgar Ambition will not live kindly with poetic Adoration; he *cannot* serve God and Mammon. Byron, like Burns, is not happy; nay he is the most wretched of all men. His life is falsely arranged: the fire that is in him is not a strong, still, central fire, warming into beauty the products of a world; but it is the mad fire of a volcano; and now—we look sadly into the ashes of a crater, which ere long will fill itself with snow!

73. Byron and Burns were sent forth as missionaries to their generation, to teach it a higher Doctrine, a purer Truth; they had a message to deliver, which left them no rest till it was accomplished; in dim throes of pain, this divine behest lay smouldering within them; for they knew not what it meant, and felt it only in mysterious anticipation, and they had to die without articulately uttering it. They are in the camp of the Unconverted; yet not as high messengers of rigorous though benignant truth, but as soft flattering singers, and in pleasant fellowship will they live there: they are first adulated, then persecuted; they accomplish little for others; they find no peace for themselves, but only death and the peace of the grave. We confess, it is not without a certain mournful awe that we view the fate of these noble souls, so richly gifted, yet ruined to so little purpose with all their gifts. It seems to us there is a stern moral taught in this piece of history, —*twice* told us in our own time! Surely to men of like genius, if there be any such, it carries with it a lesson of deep impressive significance. Surely it would become such a man, furnished for the highest of all enterprises, that of being the Poet of his Age, to consider well what it is that he attempts, and in what spirit he attempts it.

For the words of Milton are true in all times, and were never truer than in this: 'He who would write heroic poems must make his whole life a heroic poem.' If he cannot first so make his life, then let him hasten from this arena; for neither its lofty glories, nor its fearful perils, are fit for him. Let him dwindle into a modish balladmonger; let him worship and besing the idols of the time, and the time will not fail to reward him. If, indeed, he can endure to live in that capacity! Byron and Burns could not live as idol-priests, but the fire of their own hearts consumed them; and better it was for them that they could not. For it is not in the favour of the great or of the small, but in a life of truth, and in the inexpugnable citadel of his own soul, that a Byron's or a Burns's strength must lie. Let the great stand aloof from him, or know how to reverence him. Beautiful is the union of wealth with favour and furtherance for literature; like the costliest flower-jar enclosing the loveliest amaranth. Yet let not the relation be mistaken. A true poet is not one whom they can hire by money or flattery to be a minister of their pleasures, their writer of occasional verses, their purveyor of table-wit; he cannot be their menial, he cannot even be their partisan. At the peril of both parties, let no such union be attempted! Will a Courser of the Sun work softly in the harness of a Dray-horse? His hoofs are of fire, and his path is through the heavens, bringing light to all lands; will he lumber on mud highways, dragging ale for earthly appetites from door to door?

74. But we must stop short in these considerations, which would lead us to boundless lengths. We had something to say on the public moral character of Burns; but this also we must forbear. We are far from regarding him as guilty before the world, as guiltier than the average; nay from doubting that he is less guilty than one of ten

thousand. Tried at a tribunal far more rigid than that where the *Plebiscita* of common civic reputations are pronounced, he has seemed to us even there less worthy of blame than of pity and wonder. But the world is habitually unjust in its judgments of such men; unjust on many grounds, of which this one may be stated as the substance: It decides, like a court of law, by dead statutes; and not positively but negatively, less on what is done right, than on what is or is not done wrong. Not the few inches of deflection from the mathematical orbit, which are so easily measured, but the *ratio* of these to the whole diameter, constitutes the real aberration. This orbit may be a planet's, its diameter the breadth of the solar system; or it may be a city hippodrome; nay the circle of a ginhorse, its diameter a score of feet or paces. But the inches of deflection only are measured: and it is assumed that the diameter of the ginhorse, and that of the planet, will yield the same ratio when compared with them! Here lies the root of many a blind, cruel condemnation of Burnses, Swifts, Rousseaus, which one never listens to with approval. Granted, the ship comes into harbour with shrouds and tackle damaged; the pilot is blameworthy; he has not been all-wise and all-powerful: but to know *how* blameworthy, tell us first whether his voyage has been round the Globe, or only to Ramsgate and the Isle of Dogs.

75. With our readers in general, with men of right feeling anywhere, we are not required to plead for Burns. In pitying admiration he lies enshrined in all our hearts, in a far nobler mausoleum than that one of marble; neither will his Works, even as they are, pass away from the memory of men. While the Shakspeares and Miltons roll on like mighty rivers through the country of Thought, bearing fleets of traffickers and assiduous pearl-fishers on their waves; this little Valclusa Fountain will also arrest our

eye: for this also is of Nature's own and most cunning workmanship, bursts from the depths of the earth, with a full gushing current, into the light of day; and often will the traveller turn aside to drink of its clear waters, and muse among its rocks and pines!

CARLYLE'S SUMMARY.

Our grand maxim of supply and demand. Living misery and posthumous glory. The character of Burns a theme that cannot easily become exhausted. His Biographers. Perfection in Biography.—Burns one of the most considerable British men of the eighteenth century: an age the most prosaic Britain had yet seen. His hard and most disadvantageous conditions. Not merely as a Poet, but as a Man, that he chiefly interests and affects us. His life a deeper tragedy than any brawling Napoleon's. His heart, erring and at length broken, full of inborn riches, of love to all living and lifeless things. The Peasant Poet bears himself among the low, with whom his lot is cast, like a King in exile.—His Writings but a poor mutilated fraction of what was in him, yet of a quality enduring as the English tongue. He wrote, not from hearsay, but from sight and actual experience. This, easy as it looks, the fundamental difficulty which all poets have to strive with. Byron, heartily as he detested insincerity, far enough from faultless. No poet of Burns's susceptibility from first to last so totally free from affectation. Some of his Letters, however, by no means deserve this praise. His singular power of making all subjects, even the most homely, interesting. Wherever there is a sky above him, and a world around him, the poet is in his place. Every genius an impossibility till he appears.—Burns's rugged earnest truth, yet tenderness and sweet native grace. His clear, graphic 'descriptive touches' and piercing emphasis of thought. Professor Stewart's testimony to Burns's intellectual vigour. A deeper insight than any 'doctrine of association.' In the Poetry of Burns keenness of insight keeps pace with keenness of feeling. Loving Indignation and good Hatred: *Scots wha hae; Macpherson's Farewell*: Sunny buoyant floods of Humour.—Imperfections of

Burns's poetry: *Tam o' Shanter*, not a true poem so much as a piece of sparkling rhetoric: *The Jolly Beggars*, the most complete and perfect as a poetical composition. His Songs the most truly inspired and most deeply felt of all his poems. His influence on the hearts and literature of his country: Literary patriotism.—Burns's acted Works even more interesting than his written ones; and these too, alas, but a fragment: His passionate youth never passed into clear and steadfast manhood. The only true happiness of a man: Often it is the greatest minds that are latest in obtaining it: Burns and Byron. Burns's hard-worked, yet happy boyhood: His estimable parents. Early dissipations. In Necessity and Obedience a man should find his highest Freedom.—Religious quarrels and scepticisms. Faithlessness: Exile and blackest desperation. Invited to Edinburgh: A Napoleon among the crowned sovereigns of Literature. Sir Walter Scott's reminiscence of an interview with Burns. Burns's calm, manly bearing amongst the Edinburgh aristocracy. His bitter feeling of his own indigence. By the great he is treated in the customary fashion; and each party goes his several way.—What Burns was next to do, or to avoid: His Excise-and-Farm scheme not an unreasonable one: No failure of external means, but of internal, that overtook Burns. Good beginnings. Patrons of genius and picturesque tourists: Their moral rottenness, by which he became infected, gradually eat out the heart of his life. Meteors of French Politics rise before him, but they are not *his* stars. Calumny is busy with him. The little great-folk of Dumfries: Burns's desolation. In his destitution and degradation one act of self-devotedness still open to him: Not as a hired soldier, but as a patriot, would he strive for the glory of his country. The crisis of his life: Death.—Little effectual help could perhaps have been rendered to Burns: Patronage twice cursed: Many a poet has been poorer, none prouder. And yet much might have been done to have made his humble atmosphere more genial. Little Babylons and Babylonians: Let us go and *do otherwise*.

The market-price of Wisdom. Not in the power of *any* mere external circumstances to ruin the mind of a man. The errors of Burns to be mourned over, rather than blamed. The great want of his life was the great want of his age, a true faith in Religion and a singleness and unselfishness of aim.—Poetry, as Burns could and ought to have followed it, is but another form of Wisdom, of Religion. For his culture as a Poet, poverty and much suffering for a season were absolutely advantageous. To divide his hours between poetry and rich men's banquets an ill-starred attempt. Byron, rich in worldly means and honours, no whit happier than Burns in his poverty and worldly degradation: They had a message from on High to deliver, which could leave them no rest while it remained unaccomplished. Death and the rest of the grave: A stern moral, *twice* told us in our own time. The world habitually unjust in its judgments of such men. With men of right feeling anywhere, there will be no need to plead for Burns: In pitying admiration he lies enshrined in all our hearts.

THE HERO AS MAN OF LETTERS— ROBERT BURNS.

FROM "HEROES AND HERO WORSHIP."

1. It was a curious phenomenon, in the withered, unbelieving, secondhand Eighteenth Century, that of a Hero starting up, among the artificial pasteboard figures and productions, in the guise of a Robert Burns. Like a little well in the rocky desert places,—like a sudden splendour of Heaven in the artificial Vauxhall! People knew not what to make of it. They took it for a piece of the Vauxhall fire-work; alas, it *let* itself be so taken, though struggling half-blindly, as in bitterness of death, against that! Perhaps no man had such a false reception from his fellow-men. Once more a very wasteful life-drama was enacted under the sun.

2. The tragedy of Burns's life is known to all of you. Surely we may say, if discrepancy between place held and place merited constitute perverseness of lot for a man, no lot could be more perverse than Burns's. Among those secondhand acting-figures, *mimes* for most part, of the Eighteenth Century, once more a giant Original Man; one of those men who reach down to the perennial Deeps, who take rank with the Heroic among men: and he was born in a poor Ayrshire hut. The largest soul of all the British lands came among us in the shape of a hard-handed Scottish Peasant.

3. His Father, a poor toiling man, tried various things; did not succeed in any; was involved in continual difficul-

ties. The Steward, Factor as the Scotch call him, used to send letters and threatenings, Burns says, "which threw us all into tears." The brave, hard-toiling, hard-suffering Father, his brave heroine of a wife; and those children, of whom Robert was one! In this Earth, so wide otherwise, no shelter for *them*. The letters "threw us all into tears": figure it. The brave Father, I say always;—a *silent* Hero and Poet; without whom the son had never been a speaking one! Burns's Schoolmaster came afterwards to London, learnt what good society was; but declares that in no meeting of men did he ever enjoy better discourse than at the hearth of this peasant. And his poor "seven acres of nursery-ground,"—not that, nor the miserable patch of clay-farm, nor anything he tried to get a living by, would prosper with him; he had a sore unequal battle all his days. But he stood to it valiantly; a wise, faithful, unconquerable man;—swallowing-down how many sore sufferings daily into silence; fighting like an unseen Hero,—nobody publishing newspaper paragraphs about his nobleness; voting pieces of plate to him! However, he was not lost: nothing is lost. Robert is there; the outcome of him,—and indeed of many generations of such as him.

4. This Burns appeared under every disadvantage: uninstructed, poor, born only to hard manual toil; and writing, when it came to that, in a rustic special dialect, known only to a small province of the country he lived in. Had he written, even what he did write, in the general language of England, I doubt not he had already become universally recognised as being, or capable to be, one of our greatest men. That he should have tempted so many to penetrate through the rough husk of that dialect of his, is proof that there lay something far from common within it. He has gained a certain recognition, and is continuing to do so over all quarters of our wide Saxon world: wheresoever

a Saxon dialect is spoken, it begins to be understood, by personal inspection of this and the other, that one of the most considerable Saxon men of the Eighteenth Century was an Ayrshire Peasant named Robert Burns. Yes, I will say, here too was a piece of the right Saxon stuff: strong as the Harz-rock, rooted in the depths of the world;—rock, yet with wells of living softness in it! A wild impetuous whirlwind of passion and faculty slumbered quiet there; such heavenly *melody* dwelling in the heart of it. A noble rough genuineness; homely, rustic, honest; true simplicity of strength; with its lightning-fire, with its soft dewy pity;—like the old Norse Thor, the Peasant-god!—

5. Burns's Brother Gilbert, a man of much sense and worth, has told me that Robert, in his young days, in spite of their hardship, was usually the gayest of speech; a fellow of infinite frolic, laughter, sense and heart; far pleasanter to hear there, stript cutting peats in the bog, or such like, than he ever afterwards knew him. I can well believe it. This basis of mirth (*"fond gaillard,"* as old Marquis Mirabeau calls it), a primal-element of sunshine and joyfulness, coupled with his other deep and earnest qualities, is one of the most attractive characteristics of Burns. A large fund of Hope dwells in him; spite of his tragical history, he is not a mourning man. He shakes his sorrows gallantly aside; bounds forth victorious over them. It is as the lion shaking "dew-drops from his mane;" as the swift-bounding horse, that *laughs* at the shaking of the spear.—But indeed, Hope, Mirth, of the sort like Burns's, are they not the outcome properly of warm generous affection,—such as is the beginning of all to every man?

6. You would think it strange if I called Burns the most gifted British soul we had in all that century of his:

and yet I believe the day is coming when there will be little danger in saying so. His writings, all that he *did* under such obstructions, are only a poor fragment of him. Professor Stewart remarked very justly, what indeed is true of all Poets good for much, that his poetry was not any particular faculty; but the general result of a naturally vigorous original mind expressing itself in that way. Burns's gifts, expressed in conversation, are the theme of all that ever heard him. All kinds of gifts: from the gracefulest utterances of courtesy, to the highest fire of passionate speech; loud floods of mirth, soft wailings of affection, laconic emphasis, clear piercing insight; all was in him. Witty duchesses celebrate him as a man whose speech "led them off their feet." This is beautiful: but still more beautiful that which Mr. Lockhart has recorded, which I have more than once alluded to. How the waiters and ostlers at inns would get out of bed, and come crowding to hear this man speak! Waiters and ostlers:—they too were men, and here was a man! I have heard much about his speech; but one of the best things I ever heard of it was, last year, from a venerable gentleman long familiar with him. That it was speech distinguished by always *having something in it*. "He spoke rather little than much," this old man told me; "sat rather silent in those early days, as in the company of persons above him; and always when he did speak, it was to throw new light on the matter." I know not why any one should ever speak otherwise!—But if we look at his general force of soul, his healthy *robustness* every way, the rugged downrightness, penetration, generous valour and manfulness that was in him,—where shall we readily find a better-gifted man?

7. Among the great men of the Eighteenth Century, I sometimes feel as if Burns might be found to resemble

Mirabeau more than any other. They differ widely in vesture; yet look at them intrinsically. There is the same burly thick-necked strength of body as of soul;—built, in both cases, on what the old Marquis calls a *fond gail-lard*. By nature, by course of breeding, indeed by nation, Mirabeau has much more of bluster; a noisy, forward, unresting man. But the characteristic of Mirabeau too is veracity and sense, power of true *insight*, superiority of vision. The thing that he says is worth remembering. It is a flash of insight into some object or other: so do both these men speak. The same raging passions; capable too in both of manifesting themselves as the tenderest noble affections. Wit, wild laughter, energy, directness, sincerity: these were in both. The types of the two men are not dissimilar. Burns too could have governed, debated in National Assemblies; politicised, as few could. Alas, the courage which had to exhibit itself in capture of smuggling schooners in the Solway Frith; in keeping *silence* over so much, where no good speech, but only inarticulate rage was possible: this might have bellowed forth Ushers de Brézé and the like; and made itself visible to all men, in managing of kingdoms, in ruling of great ever-memorable epochs! But they said to him reprovingly, his Official Superiors said, and wrote: “You are to work, not think.” Of your *thinking*-faculty, the greatest in this land, we have no need; you are to gauge beer there; for that only are *you* wanted. Very notable;—and worth mentioning, though we know what is to be said and answered! As if Thought, Power of Thinking, were not, at all times, in all places and situations of the world, precisely the thing that *was* wanted. The fatal man, is he not always the *unthinking* man, the man who cannot think and *see*; but only grope, and hallucinate, and *missee* the nature of the thing he works with? He missees it, mis-

takes it as we say; takes it for one thing, and it is another thing,—and leaves him standing like a Futility there! He is the fatal man; unutterably fatal, put in the high places of men.—“Why complain of this?” say some: “Strength is mournfully denied its arena; that was true from of old.” Doubtless; and the worse for the *arena*, answer I! *Complaining* profits little; stating of the truth may profit. That a Europe, with its French Revolution just breaking out, finds no need of a Burns except for gauging beer,—is a thing I, for one, cannot *rejoice* at!—

8. Once more we have to say here, that the chief quality of Burns is the *sincerity* of him. So in his Poetry, so in his Life. The Song he sings is not of fantasticalities; it is of a thing felt, really there; the prime merit of this, as of all in him, and of his Life generally, is truth. The Life of Burns is what we may call a great tragic sincerity. A sort of savage sincerity,—not cruel, far from that; but wild, wrestling naked with the truth of things. In that sense, there is something of the savage in all great men.

9. Hero-worship,—Odin, Burns? Well; these Men of Letters too were not without a kind of Hero-worship: but what a strange condition has that got into now! The waiters and ostlers of Scotch inns, prying about the door, eager to catch any word that fell from Burns, were doing unconscious reverence to the Heroic. Johnson had his Boswell for worshipper. Rousseau had worshippers enough; princes calling on him in his mean garret; the great, the beautiful doing reverence to the poor moon-struck man. For himself a most portentous contradiction; the two ends of his life not to be brought into harmony. He sits at the tables of grandees; and has to copy music for his own living. He cannot even get his music copied. “By dint of dining out,” says he, “I run the risk of

dying by starvation at home." For his worshippers too a most questionable thing! If doing Hero-worship well or badly be the test of vital wellbeing or illbeing to a generation, can we say that *these* generations are very first-rate?—And yet our heroic Men of Letters do teach, govern, are kings, priests, or what you like to call them; intrinsically there is no preventing it by any means whatever. The world *has* to obey him who thinks and sees in the world. The world can alter the manner of that; can either have it as blessed continuous summer sunshine, or as unblest black thunder and tornado,—with unspeakable difference of profit for the world! The manner of it is very alterable; the matter and fact of it is not alterable by any power under the sky. Light; or, failing that, lightning: the world can take its choice. Not whether we call an Odin god, prophet, priest, or what we call him; but whether we believe the word he tells us: there it all lies. If it be a true word, we shall have to believe it; believing it, we shall have to do it. What *name* or welcome we give him or it, is a point that concerns ourselves mainly. *It*, the new Truth, now deeper revealing of the Secret of this Universe, is verily of the nature of a message from on high; and must and will have itself obeyed.—

10. My last remark is on that notablest phasis of Burns's history,—his visit to Edinburgh. Often it seems to me as if his demeanor there were the highest proof he gave of what a fund of worth and genuine manhood was in him. If we think of it, few heavier burdens could be laid on the strength of a man. So sudden; all common *Lionism*, which ruins innumerable men, was as nothing to this. It is as if Napoleon had been made a King of, not gradually, but at once from the Artillery Lieutenancy in the Regiment La Fère. Burns, still only in his twenty-seventh year, is no longer even a ploughman; he is flying

to the West Indies to escape disgrace and a jail. This month he is a ruined peasant, his wages seven pounds a year, and these gone from him: next month he is in the blaze of rank and beauty, handing down jewelled Duchesses to dinner; the cynosure of all eyes! Adversity is sometimes hard upon a man; but for one man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that will stand adversity. I admire much the way in which Burns met all this. Perhaps no man one could point out, was ever so sorely tried, and so little forgot himself. Tranquil, unastonished; not abashed, not inflated, neither awkwardness nor affectation: he feels that *he* there is the man Robert Burns; that the "rank is but the guinea-stamp"; that the celebrity is but the candle-light, which will show *what* man, not in the least make him a better or other man! Alas, it may readily, unless he look to it, make him a *worse* man; a wretched inflated wind-bag,—inflated till he *burst*, and become a *dead* lion; for whom, as some one has said, "there is no resurrection of the body"; worse than a living dog!—Burns is admirable here.

11. And yet, alas, as I have observed elsewhere, these Lion-hunters were the ruin and death of Burns. It was they that rendered it impossible for him to live! They gathered around him in his Farm; hindered his industry; no place was remote enough from them. He could not get his Lionism forgotten, honestly as he was disposed to do so. He falls into discontents, into miseries, faults; the world getting ever more desolate for him; health, character, peace of mind all gone;—solitary enough now. It is tragical to think of! These men came but to *see* him; it was out of no sympathy with him, nor no hatred to him. They came to get a little amusement: they got their amusement;—and the Hero's life went for it!

NOTES.

The student should not attempt to memorize the notes as isolated facts. In connection with the word or phrase of Carlyle's which is explained, he should carefully read the note; then, turning again to the text, he should see what additional meaning the passage has for him in the light of the explanation. The note has served its purpose when the sense and the bearing of Carlyle's words are clearly understood and fully appreciated.

¶ 1.—**Butler**: Samuel Butler (1612–1680), author of *Hudibras*, a satire on the Puritans. Charles II promised patronage to the author, but allowed him to die in poverty. *Hudibras* was one of Carlyle's favorite books while he was at the University.—**ask for bread**: *Matthew*, 7: 9.—**grand maxim of supply and demand**: The new English school of economists were maintaining that "demand and supply govern the value of all things which cannot be indefinitely increased"; for in free and active competition, the supply will be neither more nor less, neither better nor worse, than is determined by the demand and, broadly speaking, will maintain a value proportionate to the demand. (Cf. Introduction, p. 7.)—**spinning-jenny**: a machine for spinning several threads at one time, invented in 1764 by James Hargreaves. He was driven from his home in Lancaster by the weavers, who feared that they would be thrown out of employment by the invention. Contrary to Carlyle's implication, he died in poverty.—**brave mausoleum**: The first tombstone was placed over the grave at Dumfries by Mrs. Burns. This stone was sunk under the pavement of the mausoleum completed in 1815, the funds for which were raised by public subscription. The tomb is an elaborate one of Grecian design, but it is covered with a tin dome. By 1828, a monument to Burns had been erected in Alloway; and two others were in process of construction, one in London and one in Edinburgh.—**sixth narrative**: by

John Gibson Lockhart (1794-1854), son-in-law of Sir Walter Scott and (1836-'38) his biographer. Lockhart named as Burns's "four principal biographers," Heron, Currie, Walker, and Irving. The *Life of Burns* by John Stuart Blackie enumerates about 130 memoirs of the poet and about 160 appreciations, written before 1888.

¶ 2.—"No man is a hero to his valet": the phrase of Madame Corneuil of the seventeenth century; though used by Madame de Sévigné, Marshal Catinat, and Montaigne, and sometimes attributed to one of these.—**Sir Thomas Lucy**: a country squire (proprietor of Charlecote near Stratford), from whom Shakespeare was said to have stolen a deer. Prosecuted for the offense by Sir Thomas, Shakespeare retaliated by writing a satirical ballad and posting it upon a gate of the estate. There is a tradition somewhat similar of his dealings with John-a-Combe, for whom he wrote a doggerel epitaph. John Shakespeare, the poet's father, was a dealer in wool.—**Excise Commissioners**: inspectors whose business it was to collect the excise, or inland duty on certain products of home industry. (Cf. Introduction, p. 14.)—**Dumfries Aristocracy**: Dumfries was a "great stage on the road from England to Ireland." Although a provincial town, it was noted for its social gatherings. At these, Burns furnished entertainment by his wit and his songs.—**Ayr Writers**: "Writer" is a Scotch term for "lawyer." At Ayr, the question of Jean Armour's separation from Burns was referred to a writer. (Cf. Introduction, p. 13.)—**in the darkness of the Past**: Compare with this, "Great men, great events, great epochs, it has been said, grow as we recede from them, and the rate at which they grow in the estimation of men is in some sort a measure of their greatness." (J. C. Shairp, one of Burns's later biographers.)

¶ 3.—**Currie**: Dr. James Currie (1756-1805) prepared an edition of the poems of Burns introduced by a *Life of the poet*, which netted £800 for Mrs. Burns. (Cf. Note, ¶ 1.)—**Walker**: Josiah Walker, who wrote the biographical sketch for the 1811 edition of Burns's poems. (Cf. Note, ¶ 1.)—**Constable's Miscellany**: *The Miscellany of Original and Selected Publications in Literature, Science, and the Arts* was a series of volumes originally designed to provide good literature at popular prices. Archibald Constable was a famous Scottish publisher and one of the founders of the *Edinburgh Review*.

¶ 4.—**Morris Birkbeck**: the author of *Notes on a Journey in*

America from the coast of Virginia to the Territory of Illinois (1818), and *Letters from Illinois* (1818).

¶ 5.—**may appear extravagant and scanty and feeble, etc.:** An editorial interpolation? (Cf. Introduction, p. 4.)

¶ 6.—**nine days:** an old proverb, "A wonder lasts nine days, and the puppy's eyes are open."—**without model, etc.:** (Cf. Introduction, p. 11.) In what sense is Carlyle right? How far was Burns uneducated? For his development as a poet, what advantages had he over what Carlyle means by the "educated man"?—**Titans:** Giants of Grecian mythology, the children of Uranus (Heaven) and Gæa (Earth). In the battle of Cronus (Time) and the Titans against Zeus and the other gods for the rule of heaven, the Titans tore up whole mountains to hurl at the foe.

¶ 7.—**Fergusson:** Robert Fergusson (1750-1774), who, out of his short life of drudgery and poverty, left a small volume of pastoral poems in the Scottish dialect, that show some grace and much genuine feeling. While at Irvine, Burns wrote, "Rhyme I had given up, but meeting with Fergusson's Scottish Poems, I strung anew my wildly sounding lyre with emulating vigor." On Fergusson's *Farmer's Ingle*, Burns modeled *The Cotter's Saturday Night*; and on his *Leith Race*, *The Holy Fair*. One of the first things that Burns did when he went to Edinburgh in 1787 was to erect a stone with appropriate inscription by the unmarked grave of Fergusson.—**Ramsay:** Allan Ramsay (1685-1758), author of a pastoral poem called *The Gentle Shepherd*, showing, more or less coarsely, the life of the Scottish peasantry.

¶ 8.—**We . . . magnify.** (See Note, ¶ 5.)—**Sir Hudson Lowe:** Governor of St. Helena during Napoleon's captivity on that island (1815-1821).

¶ 9.—**ill-starred:** From what does the word draw its meaning?—**venerable:** What meaning here?—**hoar visage, etc.:** The whole characterization is based on Burns's own description in his Commonplace Book for April, 1783 or '84, of the way he had been affected by a winter's storm.—**walketh upon the wings of the wind:** *Psalms*, 104: 3.—**Arcadian illusion:** Arcadia was a pastoral state in the interior of early Greece. The name has been used in later literature for any rustic scene of delight and sentimental adventure. Sir Philip Sidney's famous *Arcadia* (1579-'81) is a sort of "cloud-cuckoo-land, inhabited by knights and ladies, whose manners are taken from chivalry."—**straw roof:** In Scotland, where good building stone is plentiful, stone houses

with thatched roofs are common, the straw being very skillfully laid.—Æolian harp: Where has the figure been used before in this paragraph?

¶ 10.—occasional: What is the sense of the word here?

¶ 11.—“Si vis me flere”:

“Si vis me flere, dolendum est
Primum ipsi tibi . . .”

(If you wish me to weep, you yourself must first feel grief.)—*Ars Poetica*, v. 102, 103.

¶ 12.—Byron: George Noel Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824), one of the great English poets.—Harolds: The hero of *Childe Harold*, wearied of the sensual pleasures in which he had indulged, travels far, hoping to banish his melancholy, but finds no relief from his wretchedness.—Giaours: “Giaour” is the Turkish word for “infidel,” or one who is not a Mohammedan. *The Giaour* is a sentimental tale in verse.—Don Juan: an impassioned poem of love and adventure in which the poet “waged war on every human convention.”

¶ 13.—writings . . . to fulfil it: (Compare with “His poems are . . . unfair,” ¶ 10.) Cannot the apparent contradiction be explained by understanding that, in ¶ 10, Carlyle is accounting for deficiencies in the form or literary workmanship of Burns’s poems when tried “by the strict rules of Art”; whereas, in the present instance, he is comparing his poems, composed under no compulsion, with the Letters written on the demand of more or less trying occasions, in a form of language not spontaneous with him?—Mrs. Dunlop: On reading *The Cotter’s Saturday Night*, this lady sent her servant to Burns at Mossgiel, sixteen miles, with a letter of warm appreciation and a request for half a dozen copies. This was the beginning of a friendship that lasted till Burns’s death.

¶ 14.—rose-colored Novels, etc.: In the early part of the nineteenth century the novel of adventure was rapidly increasing; the novel of character, with which Carlyle would undoubtedly have had more sympathy, had not yet identified itself as a distinct kind of literature. Many romances of that day might answer to Carlyle’s epithets: *Virgins of the Sun* are among the Fire Worshipers of Moore’s poem *Lalla Rookh*; *Virgin of the Sun* is a poetic drama of 1812, by Frederick Reynolds. We find *Knights of the Cross* and malicious Saracens in Scott’s *Ivanhoe*

and *Talisman*, stories of the Crusaders for recovery from the Saracens of the tomb of Christ at Jerusalem; and **Chiefs in wampum** in the novels of our own Charles Brockden Brown and James Fenimore Cooper.—**Homer** (about 1000 B.C.): the name to which is credited the authorship of the great Greek epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which show the Greek manners, customs, and feeling of that day transferred to the scenes and time of the destruction of Troy.

¶ 15.—the fifth act: the closing act in which “dramatic justice” must be meted out to all the characters.—**Laughter . . . sides**: suggested by Milton’s lines in *L’Allegro*:

“Sport that wrinkled Care derides
And Laughter holding both his sides.”

vates: a Latin word meaning “prophet.”—**Delphi**: in Greece, the most magnificent of the temples of Apollo, god of light, prophecy, music, and poetry.

¶ 16.—**Minerva Press**: a printing-house in London, which was noted in the eighteenth century for the publication of trashy, sentimental novels, chiefly for circulating libraries.—**Nature’s own making**: Cf. Burns’s

“Gie me ae spark o’ Nature’s fire,
That’s a’ the learning I desire;
Then tho’ I drudge thro’ dub an’ mire
At pleugh or cart,
My Muse, though hamely in attire,
May touch the heart.”—*Epistle to John Lapraik*.

the elder dramatists: particularly Shakespeare and Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher, whose plays, in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I, fixed a standard for modern English drama.—**travels from Dan to Beersheba**, etc.: “I pity the man who can travel from Dan to Beersheba, and cry ‘Tis all barren!’” from Laurence Sterne’s *In the Street. Calais*. (Cf. Note, ¶ 23.) “Dan to Beersheba” is literally from the north to the south of the dry land of Palestine; hence, any distance over the world.—**Borgia**: a Spanish family infamous in Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; conspicuously, Pope Alexander VI, his son Cardinal Cesar Borgia, and his daughter Lucrezia.—**Crockford’s**: a new and fashionable gambling club in London.—**Tulleries**: the royal palace adjoining the Louvre in Paris.

¶ 17.—poetry . . . vanished: an allusion to Macaulay's statement in his *Essay on Milton*, "As civilization advances, poetry almost necessarily declines. . . . In proportion as men know more and think more, they look less at individuals and more at classes. They therefore make better theories and worse poems."—**Halloween**: The poem describes the traditional frolics on the eve of Allhallows or All Saints, the first of November.—**Druids**: priests of the early religion of Britain, who used rites of divination.—**Theocritus**: a Greek pastoral poet of the third century, B.C. Theocritus "created his own school, with no models except those obtainable from the popular mimes and catches of his own region; just as Burns, availing himself of the simple Scottish ballads, lifted the poetry of Scotland to an eminent and winsome individuality." (Stedman.)—**Idyl**: What is the derivation of the word? What does it mean as a form of poetry?—**Holy Fair**: a name used in the west of Scotland for a gathering of the people to receive the sacrament. These gatherings, often in a tent or out of doors, became an occasion of merrymaking. Burns's poem satirized the incongruity of these sports, which were afterwards stopped. The verses were aimed at the Auld Lights. (Cf. Introduction, p. 12.)—**Council of Trent**: a meeting of Roman Catholic ecclesiasts held at Trent in the Tyrol, 1545-1563, to condemn the doctrines of the Reformation.—**Jubilee**: a solemn periodical festival in the Roman Catholic Church, during which special acts of penance are performed and a general indulgence granted.—**Superstition, Hypocrisy, Fun**: the characters in the poem who invite Burns to the Holy Fair. (Compare ¶ 17 with this from *Heroes and Hero Worship*): "Show our critics a great man, . . . they begin to what they call 'account for him'; not to worship him, but take the dimensions of him—bring him out to be a little kind of man! He was the 'creature of the Time,' they say; the Time called him forth, the Time did everything, he did nothing—but what we, the little critic, could have done too! . . . Alas! we have known Times call loudly enough for their great man; but not find him when they called! . . . Providence had not sent him; the Time calling its loudest, had to go down to confusion and wreck because he would not come when called."

¶ 18.—**burin**: the cutting tool of an engraver.—**Retzsch**: Moritz Retzsch (1779-1857), a German etcher and painter who illustrated the works of Goethe and Schiller, and Wieland's trans-

lations of Shakespeare; famous especially for the vivid terror he put into his etchings of the Faust legend.

¶ 19.—This paragraph was not in the article as originally published.—**prophesied fall**: not of the Auld Brig (bridge) as the wording would imply, but of the New Brig, and spoken by the Auld. This was an occasional poem on the opening, in 1788, of a new bridge, more lightly built than the old, across the Ayr.—**Fabulosus**: Carlyle's note suggests Horace's phrase (*Odes*, I, 22) as a parallel to "haunted Garpal." The "storied Hydaspes" was a river between the Ganges and the Indus, which marked the limits of the conquests of Alexander the Great.—**Poussin**: Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), a noted French historical and landscape painter. Among his paintings is one of the Deluge.—**Homer's Smithy**: in the *Odyssey*, Book IX.—**Priam's Chariot**: in the *Iliad*, Book XXIV.—**Burn-the-wind** (or Burnewin): a Scotch expression for "blacksmith." (See the poem *Scotch Drink*, in which Burnewin "comes on like death" with every blow as the drink foams in the cup.)—**local habitation**: (Cf. *Midsummer Night's Dream*, v. 1.)—**The pale moon**, etc.: The lines as Burns wrote them in *Open the Door to Me, Oh!* are:

"The wan moon is setting behind the white wave,
And Time is setting with me, oh!
False friends, false love, farewell! for mair
I'll ne'er trouble them, nor thee, oh!"

¶ 20.—**Clearness of sight**: Cf. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. III, "Of Many Things"—"To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion."—**Richardson**: Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), called "the founder of the English novel," author of *Pamela*, *Clarissa Harlowe*, and *Sir Charles Grandison*.—**Defoe**: Daniel Defoe (1661-1731), whose *Robinson Crusoe* and especially *Journal of the Plague* are the most striking examples in English fiction of imaginative detailed description.—**a gentleman that derived**, etc.: "A gentleman who held the patent for his honours immediately from Almighty God," the sub-title of Burns's elegy *On Captain Matthew Henderson*. Just before her marriage to Carlyle, Jane Welsh used this phrase of Carlyle, who was of peasant origin.

¶ 21.—**Stewart**: Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), Professor of Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh.—**Keats**: John Keats (1795-1821), a young English poet who worshiped beauty as

passionately as did an ancient Greek, and whose poetry has a distinct place and influence in English literature. Carlyle had written, "where the whole consists in a weak-eyed maudlin sensibility, and a certain vague random tunefulness of nature." In publishing the *Essay*, Jeffrey changed the sentence; but when Carlyle edited his collected *Essays*, he restored the original form.—**Dante:** Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), an Italian poet, author of the great epic, the *Divina Commedia*. The first of its three divisions is the *Inferno*.—**Novum Organum:** "The New Instrument," the principal philosophic work of Francis Bacon (1561–1626), in which he sets forth his system of scientific investigation. Carlyle is using against the supporters of the theory that Bacon wrote the Shakespeare plays, one of their own arguments.

¶ 22.—**doctrine of association:** the fact that ideas or states of mind are so connected one with another that one image in memory will call up another, and this another, so that thought is one continuous stream.

¶ 23.—"**But fare you weel**": from *Address to the Deil*.—**Sterne:** Laurence Sterne (1713–1768), the most humorous of that great group of the eighteenth century, who might be called the "elder novelists," of whom Richardson (Cf. Note, ¶ 20) was the first to publish.—**Dr. Slop; Uncle Toby:** characters in Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*.

¶ 25.—"**Indignation makes verses**": from Juvenal, *Satires*, I, 79, "If nature denies ability, indignation makes verses."—**Johnson . . . hater;** Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), the compiler of the first English dictionary and author of *Rasselas* and other writings; the great literary autocrat of his day and the first writer openly to refuse and denounce patronage. The allusion here is to Johnson's reported speech, "Dear Bathurst was a man to my very heart's content. He hated a fool, and he hated a rogue, and he hated a whig; he was a very good hater."

¶ 26.—"**Dweller in yon Dungeon Dark**": On a bitterly cold night in January, while on his way to Ayrshire, Burns put up at an inn, "the only tolerable one in the place." After he had comfortably settled himself for the night there arrived the funeral train of one Mrs. Oswald, reputed a miser. Burns was obliged to give up his lodging and travel twelve miles further for another. "When a good fire at New Cumnock had so far recovered my frozen sinews, I sat down and wrote the enclosed ode."—**Furies of Æschylus:** Æschylus (525–456 B.C.), the great-

est of the Greek tragic poets. His *Eumenides* shows Orestes pursued by the Furies, or goddesses of vengeance, for the murder of his mother.—darkness visible: (Cf. *Paradise Lost*, I, 63.)

¶ 27.—dithyrambic: What is this kind of verse?

¶ 28.—Celt: The Highlanders then were almost pure stock of the Celts, the first known inhabitants of Scotland.—Cacus: a giant who lived in a cave in the Aventine hill, before the building of Rome. He was slain by Hercules for stealing the oxen of Geryon, which Hercules had secured from Spain.—Nimrod: the "mighty hunter." (Cf. Genesis 10: 8, 9.)—Thebes; Pelops' line: In the mythical story, Œdipus, King of Thebes, fulfilled his fate by unknowingly killing his father. The second allusion suggests the divine intervention that shaped the fortunes of Agamemnon, grandson of Pelops, during the Trojan war. Cf. Milton's *Il Penseroso*:

"Sometime let gorgeous Tragedy
In scepter'd pall come sweeping by,
Presenting Thebes, or Pelops' line,
Or the tale of Troy divine."

¶ 30.—Tieck . . . Musäus: Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853), and Johann Karl August Musäus (1735–1787) whose writings are varied and numerous, both built most of their work out of folklore. The former, Carlyle calls "a true poet, born as well as made"; but he says that Musäus treats his material "with levity and kind, skeptical derision."—Tophet (in Hebrew, "a place to be spit on"): a valley south of Jerusalem where diabolical rites of idolatry were practiced; hence its use by Milton and others as a name for Hell.—fondly: Which meaning of the word is intended here?

¶ 31.—"Jolly Beggars": One night Burns and a friend were passing Nansie's alehouse, from which came the sound of "meikle fun and joking." They entered. The company were beggars; i. e., those who gained the sympathy of the public by feigning deformities of one kind and another. So greatly pleased was Burns with the scene that a few days afterwards he wrote the cantata, which Scott says is, for "humorous description and nice discrimination of character," superior to anything in English poetry.—Teniers: David Teniers the younger (1610–1690), a Flemish portrait and landscape painter who drew his subjects chiefly from the peasant life of his own land.—Beggars' Opera:

The first English comic opera (1728) by John Gay; a parody on the Italian Opera. Its characters were highwaymen, pick-pockets, and the like, used to depict the political corruption of the time.—**Beggar's Bush**: a play of vagabonds by John Fletcher and others in the seventeenth century.

¶ **32.—Burns . . . songs**: In *The Hero as Poet*, Carlyle says, "Observe, too, how all passionate language does of itself become musical—with a music finer than mere accent; the speech of a man even in zealous anger becomes a chant, a song. All deep things are Song."—the era of **Queen Elizabeth**: (Compare with the Songs of Burns, those in Shakespeare's plays, Marlowe's *Shepherd to His Love* and Raleigh's verses in answer to this.)—by **persons of quality**: From the Restoration to the middle of the eighteenth century, when the profession of literature was most debased by patronage, the phrase, "By a Person of Quality," was a frequent anonymous signature to trivial verses and plays by persons of rank who did not wish their names put on the same plane with those of literary hacks.—**We have tawdry**, etc.: Perhaps an allusion to the verses of the "Cavalier Poets" and their imitators during the fifty years following the accession of Charles I. (English song as here discussed is excellently illustrated by the selections in Vols. I and II of Ward's *English Poets*.)—**Ossorius**: Jeronymo Osorio (sixteenth century), an historian, who, for his Latin style, was called the "Cicero of Portugal." Carlyle has quoted from Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*.—**Limbo** (Latin, *limbus*, border): In Dante's *Inferno*, a place on the borders of Hell for the guiltless, but unbaptized. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a region in outer space where the souls of the superstitious and the weak-minded are forever whirled about by contrary winds.

¶ **33.—Venus** (or Aphrodite): the goddess of beauty. She was born of a sea-nymph beneath the waves, but being the daughter of Zeus, she was called from the depths to breathe the heavenly air of Mt. Olympus, his dwelling place.

¶ **34.—Fletcher**: Andrew Fletcher (1655–1716), a Scottish politician and political writer.

¶ **35.—Grays and Glovers**: Thomas Gray (1716–1771). His famous "*Elegy in a Country Churchyard*" is not only a piece of exquisite work; it is steeped in England," says Professor Stopford Brooke; but his other verses are fully open to Carlyle's charge. Richard Glover (1712–1785) wrote verse more or less

political and abstract.—**in vacuo**: in space.—**Goldsmith**: Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774) gives in his *Vicar of Wakefield* and *The Deserted Village*, as well as in his other works, excellent pictures of lowly life among the English and Irish people.—**Rambler**: a paper modeled after the *Spectator*, which Dr. Johnson published semi-weekly in London, during the years 1750–1752.—**Rasselas**: a didactic romance laid in the “happy valley” of a purely imaginary Abyssinia.

¶ 36.—**Geneva**, Switzerland, was said to have little national feeling because of the large number of strangers resorting there.—**no literature**: Has Carlyle left out of account those writers whom Burns said had served him as models?—**Addison and Steele**: Joseph Addison (1672–1719) and Richard Steele (1672–1729) in 1711 founded *The Spectator*, a periodical modeled after *The Tatler* which Steele had founded, and had just discontinued after a two years’ run, and to which Addison had largely contributed. In both these papers matters of daily life were discussed in charming style, and follies lightly satirized.—**John Boston**: not John but Thomas Boston (1677–1732), a theologian, wrote *Human Nature in the Fourfold State*.—**Jacobite** (Latin, *Jacobus*, “James”): the adherents of James II and his line (the Stuarts) against William of Orange and the Whig succession.—**Kames**: Henry Home, Lord Kames (1692–1782), a distinguished judge, author of *The Elements of Criticism*.—**Hume**: David Hume (1711–1776), a Tory philosopher, author of a *History of England* and *The Natural History of Religion*.—**Robertson**: William Robertson (1721–1793), author of the *History of the Emperor Charles V* and a *History of Scotland*.—**Smith**: Adam Smith, who wrote *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), the first English scientific treatise on political economy.—**Racine**: Jean Baptiste Racine (1639–1699), a famous French tragic poet, the most finished artist of the classical school.—**Voltaire**: François Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694–1798), a brilliant French philosopher, historian, critic, and poet, who satirized religion and morality and infected many strong minds with his skepticism.—**Batteaux**: Charles Batteaux (1713–1780), a French writer on æsthetics.—**Boileau**: Nicholas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711), a poet and the most prominent French critic of his day, who effected a revolution in the poetical taste of the French. To his *Art of Poetry* especially are due the theories that have governed the classical

literature of France.—**Montesquieu**: Charles de Secondet, Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755), an influential French jurist and philosophical writer, author of *The Spirit of the Laws*.—**Mably**: Gabriel Bonnot, Abbé de Mably (1709–1785), a French publicist whose *Parallel between the Romans and the French in Respect to Government* was widely read.—**Quesnay**: François Quesnay, court physician to Louis XV, who, pondering on the differences between the luxurious nobles who owned vast estates and the starving peasants who toiled in their fields and vineyards, worked out a theory of industry in which he divided its product into capital, interest and profits, rent, and wages. His theory was limited to agriculture. Eighteen years after his *Tableau économique* (“Economic Picture”) appeared, Adam Smith in Scotland corrected Quesnay’s theories to apply to the manufacturing, mercantile, and other industries that were being rapidly capitalized.—**La Flèche**: a town on the river Loire in France, where Hume spent several years in order to finish uninterruptedly his *Treatise on Human Nature*.—**Doctrine of Rent**: In his lectures at the University of Glasgow, Professor Adam Smith was teaching that the rent of any natural producer—say a piece of farm land—was the surplus value of product that the land was able to produce over and above all the costs of working the land. On this theory fully considered depends the scheme of valuation of land and what it may be hired for.

¶ 37.—**Propaganda Missionaries**: The *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (“Society for Propagating the Faith”) is an organized body of the Roman Catholic Church, with the purpose of sending out missionaries of their faith.—“a tide of Scottish prejudice . . . heart”: “The story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins, which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest.” (Burns’s letter to Dr. Moore, Aug. 2, 1787.) “The appellation of a Scottish bard is by far my highest pride; to continue to deserve it my most exalted ambition.” (Letter to Mrs. Dunlop).—**happy valley**: In Dr. Johnson’s tale, *Rasselas*, the prince of Abyssinia, discontented and curious, leaves the happy valley to see the great world, but returns to it gladly, having found nothing without but care and perplexity.—**rejoices to snatch**: (Cf. Note on Fergusson, ¶ 7.)—“A wish,” etc.: From the poem *To the Guid-wife of Wauchope House*.

¶ 39.—clearness . . . aim: “To know myself had been all

along my constant study. I weighed myself alone; I balanced myself with others; I watched every means of information, how much ground I occupied as a man and as a poet; I studied assiduously Nature's design, where she seemed to have intended the various lights and shades in my character. . . . The great misfortune of my life was never to have an aim. I had felt early some stirrings of ambition, but they were the blind gropings of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave." (Letter of Burns to Dr. Moore.)

¶ 40.—**"preëstablished harmony"**: The German philosopher Leibnitz conceived that while all things in the world have a certain power of self-activity, they cannot act one upon another; so that whatever seems to us interaction is due to a wise foreordination or "preëstablished harmony" by which states of being correspond to one another without exerting any mutual influence.—**appointed steward over**: (Cf. *Luke*, 16: 1-13; 1 *Peter*, 4: 10.)

¶ 41.—**crossing the brook**: When in 49 B.C., in defiance of the law, Cæsar crossed the Rubicon, which divided his province of Gaul from Italy proper, he opened the civil war whereby he advanced himself to be conqueror of the world.—**cheap school system**: Not free schools but public schools, where the fee was a mere trifle.—**Unjust men**: After a year of bad luck with the farm, Burns's father was once threatened with eviction by the factor or bailiff of the estate from which he rented his land.—**"in glory," etc.**: On the title page of Lockhart's *Life of Burns* are found these two lines from Wordsworth's *The Leech Gatherer, or Resolution and Independence*:

"Of him who walked in glory and in joy

Behind his plough upon the mountain-side."

¶ 42.—**Burns was happy**: Burns himself wrote: "This kind of life—the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave—brought me to my sixteenth year. . . . I was . . . perhaps the most ungainly, awkward boy in the parish." Does this refute Carlyle's "evidence"? In what sense does he find Burns "up to this date happy" (Cf. ¶ 39 and the opening of ¶ 41), and with what began his unhappiness?—**toga of Manhood**: The ceremony of donning the toga, or citizen's robe, marked the coming of age of a Roman youth.—**sharp adamant of fate, etc.**: In the *Third Calendar* of the *Arabian Nights* a mountain of adamant attracts a ship because of her iron nails, drawing out the nails, so that the ship sinks.

¶ 43.—“**passions raging like demons**”: “My passions when once they were lighted up, raged like so many devils till they got vent in rhyme; and then conning over my verses, like a spell soothed them all into quiet.” (Letter to Dr. Moore concerning his twenty-third year.)—**character for sobriety**: Burns’s brother Gilbert wrote, “Notwithstanding these circumstances [his new habits and associations at Irvine] and the praise he has bestowed on Scotch drink (which seems to have misled his historians), I do not recollect, during those seven years [from the time that Burns was seventeen until he was twenty-four] nor till his growing celebrity occasioned his being often in company, to have seen him intoxicated; nor was he at all given to drinking.”—“**hungry Ruin**,” etc.: (The quotation is from Burns’s letter to Dr. Moore.) The parents of Jean Armour, although determined to annul the marriage between her and Burns, threatened Burns with imprisonment, unless for the support of her children he should give bonds for a specified sum, beyond Burns’s ability to meet.

¶ 44.—**Rienzi**: Cola di Rienzi (1313–1354), the son of a Roman tavern keeper, who set out to be a scholar and reformer; but after having had himself proclaimed tribune of “the holy Roman republic,” he so offended princes and people by his arrogance that he was driven from the city, and finally slain by a Roman mob.—**strength in him as well as about him**: i. e., potential strength of both intellect and character, as well as the strength that was his by virtue of what he had already done. It is characteristic of Carlyle that he should make such a distinction, looking below a man’s reputation and attainments to what the man’s whole self was capable of.

¶ 45.—**thrice-piled**: with a pile, or nap, three times as thick as commonly; therefore, of superior elegance.

¶ 47.—“**Virgillum vidi tantum**”: “I have at least seen Virgil.”—**Professor Ferguson**: Adam Ferguson (1723–1816), who preceded Dugald Stewart as professor of philosophy at Edinburgh.—**Bunbury**: an English amateur artist and caricaturist of that day.

¶ 48.—**Langhorne**: John Langhorne (1735–1779), an English poet and prose writer, who translated Plutarch’s *Lives*.

¶ 49.—**Nasmyth**: Alexander Nasmyth (1721–1840) of Edinburgh. His portrait of Burns is in the Scottish National Gallery. (See illustration facing p. 55.)

¶ 50.—**in malam partem**: in bad part, with evil intention.

¶ 53.—**Blacklock**: Thomas Blacklock (1721–1791), a blind poet of Edinburgh, who is known in Scotland as “the discoverer of Burns.” His warm commendation of the first edition elicited from Burns the remark, “The Doctor belonged to a set of critics for whose applause I had not dared to hope.” At his suggestion the second edition was issued.—**modica**: Latin plural of *modicum*.

¶ 54.—**lie at the pool . . . healed**: (Cf. *John* 5: 2–4.)—**borrow honor**: The quotation is from Lockhart’s *Life*.

¶ 55.—**His donation . . . pleasure**: When Burns married and left home, he gave to his mother £180, in lieu of the support that he would have contributed had he remained one of the household. This was accepted as a loan without interest, and on Burns’s death was repaid to his widow.

¶ 56.—**Mæcenases**: Mæcenās, a Roman statesman of the days of Augustus Cæsar, was the friend and patron of Horace and Virgil and many of the artists of Italy: hence anyone who patronizes writers or artists.

¶ 57.—**without sin . . . stone**: (Cf. *John* 8: 3–7.)—**Jacobin**: a member of a political club in France in sympathy with the revolutionists; so called from the Jacobin convent in which they held their secret meetings.—**Lady Grizzel Baillie** (1665–1746): a celebrated Scottish loyalist.

¶ 60.—**Spurned all other reward**: Are the words “volunteer” and “patriot” here used literally or metaphorically? (Cf. Introduction, p. 15.)

¶ 62.—**twice cursed**: An adaptation of Shakespeare’s

“The quality of mercy is not strained,

. . . it is twice blessed:

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.”

—*Merchant of Venice*, iv. 1.

¶ 63.—**Poor promotion**: from Supervisor to Excise Collector.—**King Charles**: Charles II, ruler of England from 1660 to 1685.—**Butler**: (Cf. Note, ¶ 1.)—**King Philip**: Philip II, ruler of Spain from 1556 to 1598.—**Grandees**: Spanish nobles.—**Cervantes**: Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547–1616), a celebrated Spanish poet and novelist, author of *Don Quixote*, and a great number of verses, plays, and romances. It is true that after he had become famous he struggled with poverty and at times even suffered imprisonment for debt, being unrewarded by any pension

from the King; but it is also true that he was a loose liver, irregular in what employment he did obtain, and improvident. He had served in his King's wars, been twice shot in the chest and had his left hand maimed for life at Lepanto (wherefor he was nicknamed "The Cripple of Lepanto") and been left for some years a slave in Algiers. But this was the common fortune of war and occurred before his country was under obligation to his genius as a writer. There is no reliable evidence to support the tradition that *Don Quixote* was begun in prison, nor was it finished in prison; and Cervantes was rewarded by the immediate general acceptance of his work—but the more reason why, in a day of patronage, this might have obtained for him an endowment from royalty.—**Grapes of thorns:** (Cf. *Matthew*, 7: 16–19.)—**preserved:** What is the meaning of the word here?—**Babylons:** i. e., Babels, or schemes for self-glorification. (Cf. *Genesis*, 11: 4.—**primeval Chaos:** It was a theory of ancient mythology that out of formless chaos was made the universe—a theory which Milton altered to his use in *Paradise Lost*.—**do otherwise:** a perversion of *Luke*, 10: 37.—**Love . . . burdens:** (Cf. *John*, 13: 34 and *Galatians*, 6: 2.—**Fardels:** (Consult the dictionary for derivation and use, and Cf. *Hamlet*, iii. 1.)

¶ 64.—**Homer:** An old rhyme, which speaks without authority, says:

"Seven cities fought for Homer dead,
Through which the living Homer begged his bread."

Socrates (470–399 B.C.): The great teacher and philosopher of Athens who was sentenced to death and given poisonous hemlock to drink, on the charge of corrupting the youth of the city by disaffecting them from the worship of the gods.—**Roger Bacon** (1214–1294): an English monk and philosopher, now acknowledged to have been the first great English scientist, who was imprisoned for writing heresy, and who died in neglect.—**Galileo:** Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), an Italian scientist, inventor of the telescope, who was imprisoned for believing that it is the earth that revolves around the sun, and not *vice versa*.—**Tasso:** Torquato Tasso (1544–1595), author of the Italian epic *Jerusalem Delivered*, which, being written in the vulgar tongue (i. e., Italian, not Latin) and following upon the era of the Crusades, was read throughout all Europe. For seven years during this period of his literary popularity Tasso was confined in a madhouse for

political reasons.—**Camoens**: Luiz de Camoens (1524–1580), the great Portuguese poet who wrote the epic *The Lusiad*.—**So persecuted they, etc.**: (Cf. *Matthew*, 5: 12.)

¶ 65.—**Triumphed . . . captive**: (Cf. *Psalms*, 68: 18.)

¶ 66.—**Restaurateur**: an eating-house keeper.

¶ 67.—**Locke**: John Locke (1632–1704). When his friend and patron, the Earl of Shaftesbury, accused of high treason, fled to Holland, Locke went with him.—**Milton**: John Milton (1608–1674) was already famous for his shorter poems and plays when he was appointed Secretary for Foreign Tongues to the Commonwealth. On the accession of Charles II, he was without position and forced to go into hiding. His eyes had given out under the strain of long study and his labors as Secretary, so the whole of *Paradise Lost* he had to dictate. The poet knew that in the Cavalier days of the Restoration he should have but few readers for his religious epic. Cf., from Book VII of *Paradise Lost*:

“More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchang’d
To hoarse or mute, though fall’n on evil days,
On evil days though fall’n, and evil tongues.

. . . Still govern thou my song,
Urania, and fit audience find, though few.”

Cervantes: (See Note, ¶ 63.)—**Araucana**: begun about 1555 by Alonso de Ercilla. The story gets its name from Arauco, Chile, in the expedition against which the author took part.

¶ 68.—**reasonable service**: (Cf. *Romans*, 12: 1.)—**golden calf**: (Cf. *Exodus*, 3: 1–7.)

¶ 69.—**Darkness and the shadow**: (Cf. *Job*, 10: 21.)—**Rabelais**: François Rabelais (1495–1553) took the vows of a monk. While at a Benedictine monastery he studied medicine and earned his degree. Subsequently he traveled much through France and Italy. His studies and his own inquiring mind fostered his doubts about religion. His great work, *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel*, is a humorous satire of prose and verse directed largely against the church.

¶ 70.—**Jean Paul**: the pseudonym of Jean Paul Friedrich Richter (1763–1825), a German writer of numerous novels and short tales, satirical sketches, and essays. He was a philosopher of much humor. (Cf. Carlyle’s *Essay on Richter*.)—**Serve God**

and **Mammon**: Mammon was the Syrian god of wealth; hence, "worldliness." (Cf. *Matthew*, 16: 24.)

¶ 73.—**He who would write**: In the *Apology for Smectymnus*, one of Milton's polemical pamphlets in defence of the Commonwealth, in which he defended also himself and his own beliefs, he wrote: "He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem."—**Courser of the Sun**: that is, one of the horses of the Greek god Helios, who daily drove across the heavens the chariot of the sun. Carlyle here makes use of the post-classic idea that Apollo, god of light, inspiration and poetry, is god also of the sun.

¶ 74.—**Plebiscita**: the Latin, meaning "the acts of the assembly of the people (*plebes*)"; hence, a general popular vote.—**ginhorse**: a horse hitched to the crank of a gin or mill, which he turns by walking continually in a circle.—**Swifts**: Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), best known in literature as the writer of *Gulliver's Travels*, was an Irish prelate whose powerful satires were for some years a mainstay of the Tory party in England. Swift was as greatly beloved by the people of his own land as he was maligned by his political opponents.—**Rousseau**: Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), a Swiss-French philosopher, the bare facts of whose life present a strange paradox. He was seemingly utterly unprincipled in many acts of his private life; but the teachings of his books forecast nearly every reform in religion, law, and education carried out by France in the last hundred years. His theory that man is by nature good and is corrupted only by education was the root of his attacks upon the established institutions of his day. His *Social Contract* gave impetus to the French Revolution. He was long without honor in his own country; but at the time Carlyle was writing this Essay, his works had a rapidly growing discipleship in Germany and England.—**Ramsgate**: a seaside watering place in Kent, popular with Londoners on excursion days.—**Isle of Dogs**: a peninsula formed within the city of London by a bend in the river Thames.

¶ 75.—**Valclusa Fountain**: near Avignon in southern France. At Valclusa Petrarch wrote his lasting *Sonnets to Laura*. What is the force of the metaphor here?

EXERCISES AND SUGGESTIONS.

QUESTIONS TO SHOW THE COURSE OF THE ESSAY.

In the following outline, Carlyle's discussion of all subjects not limited to the life and writings of Burns are treated as digressions, and set off in italics. These go to make up Carlyle's contribution to a theory of literature and to a theory of life. The student should trace carefully in the Essay the transitions from one topic to the next.

THE INTRODUCTION (§§ 1-5).

1. In what two ways is this an introduction to the Essay?

What is the discussion of biography in general?

THE EXPOSITION (§§ 6-70).

A. The Personality of Burns (§§ 6-9).

1. What is now the reputation of Burns? How justly is this founded on the work that he did and the obstacles that he overcame?

What is the function of criticism?

2. What special power was Burns's? What attribute of his made up this power? How did he show each in (a) his feeling toward nature? (b) toward men? (c) his attitude toward those socially above him? What did the world do for him in return?

B. The Writings of Burns (§§ 10-36).

I. Intellectual and Moral Qualities (§§ 11-23).

1. What intellectual and moral qualities of Burns show in his writings?

*What is the rarest excellence in literature?
What the bane of literature? In what does
each consist?*

2. By what comparisons and contrasts of Burns's work with that of other authors are these various qualities illustrated?

What is more important in poetry than the actualities or "form of life" written about? Why?

(Summary) *What is the power of the poet?
What makes the poet, and what does not?
Is or is not the poet the product of his
times, and why?*

3. In what two capabilities of Burns lies the strength of his work?

What characteristic is the "root and foundation of every sort of talent"?

4. What is there distinctive about Burns's power and manner of description? How is this illustrated by comparison with other authors?

5. What is meant by "the vigor of his strictly intellectual perceptions"?

What is "the essence of a truly poetical endowment"?

6. What is meant by the "fineness of his understanding"?

(This part of the exposition has now (§ 23) been treated in detail and brought again to its first summary, "Keeness of insight.")

II. Emotional Qualities (§§ 23-28).

1. What quality of Burns "keeps pace" with his "keenness of insight"?

Discuss the truth of "Indignation makes verses."

2. What verses did Burns's "love" and "indignation" make?

3. In what verses did he show "love" in the "lighter disguise" of humor?

III. Poems Technically Criticized (§§ 29, 30).

4. What is Carlyle's criticism of all the poems so far mentioned? Why?

In the criticisms of "Tam o' Shanter" and "The Jolly Beggars," what technical merits does Carlyle declare necessary to any true poem?

IV. The Songs of Burns (§§ 31-36).

How is a song defined?

1. How are Burns's Songs ranked in English literature?
2. What are the merits of the Songs (a) in spirit or sentiment? (b) in form?
3. Explain the relation between Burns's Songs and his influence.

Describe the literature popular in Britain in the time of Burns.

What was the "singular aspect" of Scottish literature in the eighteenth century, and how is it accounted for and illustrated?

4. How soon was the change in Scottish literature brought about, and how much was it due to Burns?

C. The Life of Burns (§§ 37-58).

I. The Complexity of Burns's Life as a Whole.—Introduction (§§ 37-39).

1. How may the judgment of his poems be applied to his life?
2. Why was there "but one era" in his life, and into what parallel causes is this fact analyzed?
3. What was the complex condition of his outward life?

II. The Facts of His Life and Their Moral Significance (§§ 40-57).

i. The Period of His Residence at Irvine (¶¶ 40-42).

1. What had been his condition up to this time, as to (a) his surroundings? (b) his inward experiences?
2. What kind of life did he lead at Irvine, and with what moral result?

Is there any value in dissipation as a training for life? or what is it "that fits us for true Manly Action"? and when does "Manhood" begin?

3. What other untoward circumstances affected Burns's life, and how?

ii. His Appearance in Edinburgh (¶¶ 43-54).

1. Why is this "one of the most singular phenomena in modern Literature"?
2. What was the "lasting injury" this winter did him?
3. What was the "failure of internal means" which kept Burns dependent on patronage?
4. What comment is here on the moral responsibility of his patrons?

iii. At Dumfries (¶¶ 55-58).

1. What was now his life to himself and his character before the world—and why?
2. Still, what testimony to his greatness? In what last service to his country did he show his moral strength?

III. The Crisis and End of His Life.—Conclusion (¶ 58).

1. How does the discussion of the three possible issues summarize his life?

D. Reflections on Burns's Life (¶¶ 59-67).

1. What comments on Burns's hardships have been offered by two classes of his admirers? What are the author's conclusions about each?

How is the "principle of modern Honor" opposed to the "old heroic sense of Friendship"?

2. Where does the blame of Burns's failure not lie? How is this point sustained and illustrated? Where does it lie?

Considering Nature's relation to man, and man's relation to things spiritual, why must the blame of failure lie always with himself?

3. What was the essential weakness of Burns? Why was poverty no excuse for it? What cases are contrasted with Burns's? in what three respects?

What two things are indispensable characteristics of great men?

4. Discuss Burns's religion.
5. What was his conception of poetry? Why then did he fail?¹

What is the relation of poverty to success?

6. What is the moral taught by Byron and Burns?

THE CONCLUSION (§§ 68-71).

1. What is Carlyle's final judgment of Burns?
How is it that the world is "habitually unjust in its judgments" of men?
2. What is Carlyle's final judgment of Burns's verse?

¹ How often is this stated in one form or another in the Essay?

FOR THE FURTHER STUDY OF THE ESSAY.

ITS SUBJECT MATTER.

To answer each of the following questions, select, not one passage, but all the passages in the Essay that discuss the topic; and then write a paragraph or two based on the selections you have made.

1. "... here was an action . . . do otherwise" (§ 60): From what you know of Carlyle's beliefs (recall the Introduction as well as the Essay), how much of his philosophy of life and criticism is expressed in this one passage?

2. From the evidences in the Essay and the facts given in the Introduction, state what personal qualities and what conditions of life were common to both Burns and Carlyle.

3. What incidents of Burns's life were the outward expression of his essential weakness—the which, explain. What incidents of his life showed his moral strength?

4. What is Carlyle's discussion of the obligation and the moral effect of "Patronage"?

5. "Up to this time Burns was happy" (§ 41): What change in Burns's life is referred to? What was the cause of his happiness? of his unhappiness?

6. "The conduct of Burns under this dazzling blaze of favor" (§ 50): What was that conduct?

7. "His life has now lost its unity" (§ 55): What period of Burns's life is meant by "now"? What is the meaning of the word "unity" as here applied, and what incidents of Burns's life account for the loss?

8. "Still we do not think that the blame of Burns's failure lies chiefly with the world" (§ 61): To what extent did it lie with the world, and in what actual ways might the world have helped him? To what extent did it lie with himself, and through what causes?

9. For the creation of poetry "what . . . had these two men [Milton and Cervantes], which Burns wanted" (§ 65)? Illustrate from facts given about the lives of all three.

10. What have proved to be the advantages and what the disadvantages, if any, of scholastic education in the training of poets?

11. What were the leading features of Burns's mind?

12. What were the peculiar merits of his poems?

13. In what respects do his Songs exceed in merit his other poems? Illustrate this by your original analysis of some two poems mentioned in the Essay.

14. What had been the nature of British literature in the century preceding Burns?

15. "There is a stern moral taught in this piece of history—*twice* taught in our own time!" (§ 70): What is the moral, and how "twice" taught?

16. Show by discussion and illustration how Burns's poems are (1) personal; (2) national; (3) universal.

17. In what did Burns lack being "absolutely a great poet"?

ITS STRUCTURE AND STYLE.

1. In what points does the structure of this Essay comply with the rules you have learned for the writing of exposition?

2. Take what we have termed the "digressions" in the Essay and show whether each is or is not necessary to the development of the whole.

3. Look in turn at several paragraphs,—e. g., §§ 9, 23, 51, and 64—and, in each case, compare its concluding sentences with the introductory sentence of the following paragraph. By what methods of transition does the author carry his thought ahead?

4. What is gained by the insertion of the paragraphs not originally in the Essay?

5. Select illustrations of the use of loose and periodic sentence structure. Which does Carlyle use the more? In what cases has he strikingly made these the means of climax or anti-climax?

6. In the German language, every noun is capitalized. Throughout the English literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we find abstractions treated allegorically or personified, and the names written with capitals. From what you know of Carlyle's studies and reading, how far do you think this accounts for his use of capitals? Note first when he uses capitals.

7. What illustrations do you find of (1) obsolete words; (2) current words used not in their more usual sense; (3) foreign words; (4) forcible common or colloquial words; (5) words of Carlyle's own coining; (6) poetic or quaint expressions.

8. Look at the metaphors in ¶¶ 7, 17, 50, 55, and 69. Which are contained in a single word and which are sustained? Add other illustrations. What does the thought gain by each of these metaphors?

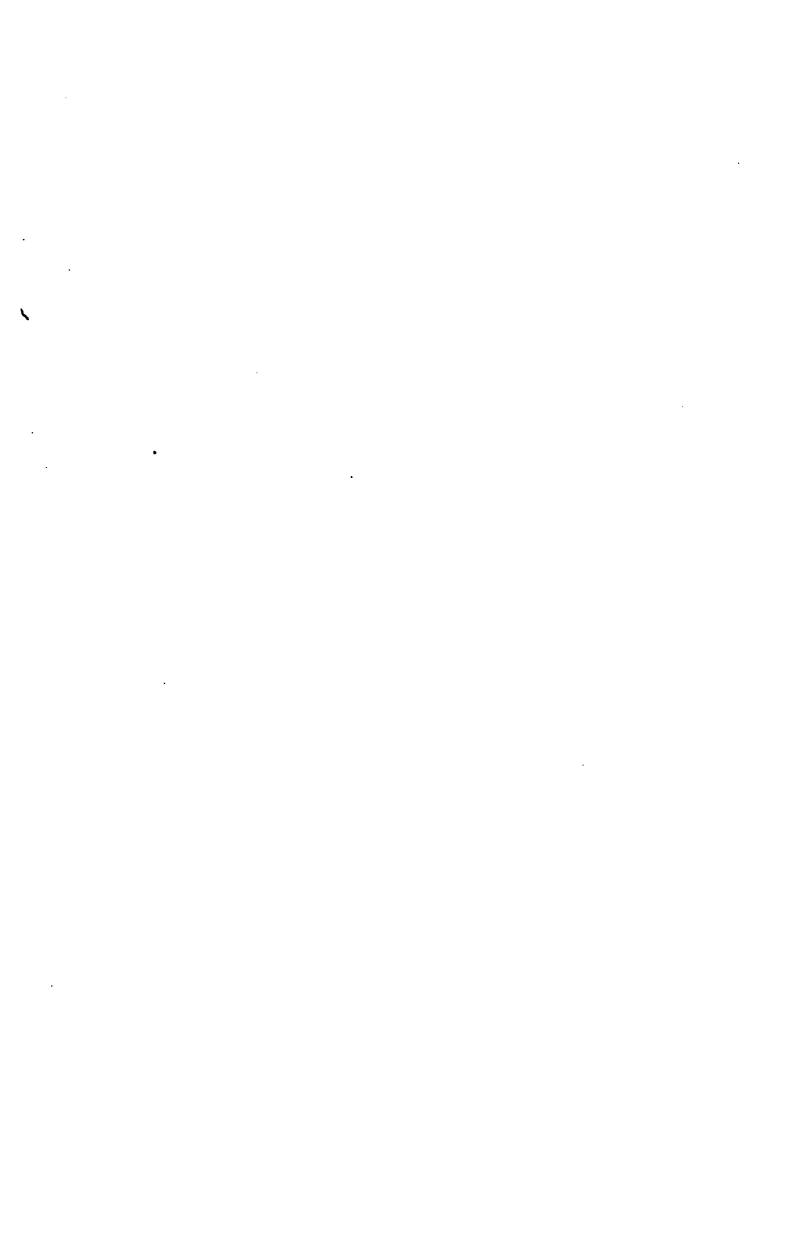
9. Run over the allusions in the Essay and classify them to show what range of learning Carlyle had at his command.

10. Comment, selecting phrases in illustration, on Carlyle's use of the comparative and superlative of adjectives and adverbs. What effect does it produce?

11. Describe, selecting sentences in illustration, his use of negatives.

12. Pick out a word, a phrase, or a sentence, here and there, to illustrate the following qualities: vividness; positiveness; directness, as of personal speech; simplicity; passionate earnestness; clearness by the use of (a) balance, (b) contrast, (c) question and answer.

13. Recalling the conditions under which the Essay was written (See Introduction, p. 5), account for the inaccuracies of quotation throughout the Essay.



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